A Stellar Adventure
A Pokémon Scarlet and Violet DLC Zine

Foreword

Hello and thank you so much for embarking on this journey with us!

A Stellar Adventure is a zine dedicated to the incredible DLC of Pokemon Scarlet and Violet. You will find artwork, merchandise, and writings based upon both parts of the DLC and we cannot thank our contributors enough for creating such beautiful works. They all spent countless hours and dedication to create each piece and we hope you enjoy it.

Please don't forget to support each creator you loved individually as well! Thank you for being a part of this ride, it's been a stellar adventure!

- A Stellar Adventure Mod Team

A Stellar Adventure: A Pokémon Scarlet and Violet DLC Zine is an unofficial fan project and is no way associated with Gamefreak

Table of Contents

Art by artisticallytwistedtea 5

Before The Fireworks by Taruchinator 6
Spot Art by Aatom87

Art by Minhriart 17

The Fury of an Adorable Ogre by SaimatsuShipper 18
Spot Art by Moni

Art by Cheru 28

Penpals by Charley 29

Art by Nym 37

Sana Sana Colita de Rana by EV 38

Art by CoolCoolSkies 45

Goin' on a Beast Hunt, Gonna Catch a… Ferocious Beast? by Vivi (Octofae) 46
Spot Art by Amuerion & Aileen Catherine

Art by Vanilla 60

Refraction by Blitz 62

Art by Feiyu 68

Art by ItsLanners 69

Briar's Book Chapter X: Finding Terapagos. by VeloxVoid 70
Spot Art by Aatom87 & Cas Lynn

Art by Cas Lynn 75

Table of Contents

Art by yami11arts 76

Art by Amuerion 78

Yes, Chef! by PerennialFall 80
Spot Art by Herakushi

Art by Herakushi 91

Comic by Yams 92

Art by Aatom87 94

A Slacker's Guide on Taming Battle-hungry Children by Ellory 95
Spot Art by Minhriart & Cheru

Art by Cardinal Crossing 107

Comic by Aileen Catherine 108

Merchandise **110**

Contributor Credits **114**

Mod Team **117**

Before The Fireworks

Written By: Taruchinator
Spot art by: Aatom87

Kitakami Hall was bursting with energy.

Juliana had never seen such a large group of people gathered together since arriving at the small rural land, granted she'd only been to Mossui Town prior, and it was definitely much calmer than the big city she was used to back home.

When Kieran invited her to accompany him and his sister to the Festival of Masks, the brunette was ecstatic—spending time with her new friends *and* getting to learn about the culture was a win-win in her book! And so, after receiving a thoughtful gift from their grandmother in the form of a lovely green jinbei, the trio made their way and were now standing at the grand entrance.

The boy next to her adjusted his mask while gesturing at the stalls in front of them, a sheepish smile on his face. "This is the Festival of Masks! Today's just the first day, so it'll keep going for a while…"

"Woah…" Juliana could only gawk at her surroundings, excitement evident from the sparkle in her eyes. "I've never been to a festival before!"

Carmine made herself known with a swish of her hair, pride very much present as she turned towards the younger girl with a half smirk. "Figured you wouldn't have something as grand as this in Paldea or whatever!"

Kieran only shook his head in slight annoyance. "Just ignore her, Juliana. She's just as excited as we are."

Pink immediately dusted the older girl's cheeks, causing her to lightly shove her brother in retaliation. The brunette could only giggle into her fist at the adorable display. "Shut it, Kiki! I'm *trying* to show that Kitakami can be just as good as any shiny city she's seen before! *Anyways*, we should take a photo to remember this amazing night forever."

After reaching for Juliana's Roto-Stick, Carmine turned to the duo with a smile as she motioned for them to come closer. "Come on you two, scooch closer! Say Chansey!"

A few awkward shuffling and pose decisions later and the picture was taken, with them each commenting on how they came out. It was Kieran who brought everyone's attention back to the task at hand, already pointing at a particular stall with a smile. "Alright, we shouldn't stand here forever or else the fun events are gonna end soon!"

Before Juliana could sprint alongside him, Carmine placed her hands on both their shoulders to halt their movements. "Hold it, you two! We need an itinerary if we're planning to get the full festival experience!"

"Ugh, come on, sis! Not everything needs to be so complicated…" Kieran's shoulders slumped as he rolled his eyes, which only earned him another smack on the back of the head. "Ow! H-Hey!"

"We can't cover everything in one night, so we have to decide on what we'll be doing before going in. It's just like battling, if you think about it. So quit complaining!" Carmine's arguments actually made some sense, despite her rash approach on the matter. She then turned to Juliana with a raised eyebrow. "Since you're the guest, you get the first pick. What do *you* want to do?"

The brunette wasn't too picky, if she was being honest. She just wanted to start their outing already. That being said… "I mean… the games look like fun! I'd like to check at least *one* of them out–still not sure which, though…"

"We can arrange that. There aren't that many stalls to begin with, plus Kiki and I can just give you the quick rundown for most of them so you can choose more easily." Carmine spoke in acknowledgment, then proceeded to turn to her other side at the shorter boy beside her. "Speaking of which, what about you, Kiki?"

Kieran scratched his cheek sheepishly while averting his gaze. "Um, I mean, if we're gonna play at a stall already, then I think we can try some food. I was personally looking forward to the candy apples. I'm sure Juli–I-I mean, *all of us* would enjoy them!"

Carmine nodded and hummed to herself, a smile gracing her lips as she crossed her arms. "Then that just leaves me! We're going to the Ogre Oustin arena before the fireworks show!"

"Ogre Oustin?" Juliana couldn't help her curiosity from tilting her head to the side.

"You'll see it later, no point in explaining now." Carmine waved a dismissive hand in the brunette's direction, which only piqued the Paldean's interest even more. Since the older of the three seemed to be satisfied with their current schedule, she finally nudged them forward and raised her fist in excitement. "Alrighty, let's do this!"

Exchanging a look between each other, Kieran and Juliana couldn't help but silently snicker at the sudden change in attitude. But they didn't question it.

The festival was calling for them, after all.

"*Ugh!* Why won't you *fall?!*"

It didn't take long for Juliana to find a game she wanted to play.

As the trio walked past the different stalls–with the Kitakami siblings explaining what each one was about and saying hello to anyone they recognized–the Paldean stared in awe until her gaze landed on a particular one.

It was a medium sized structure with a few people already in line, with the ones in front holding toy rifle guns and aiming them at different trinkets that had the girl's eyes widening. Carmine took notice of her interest, and so stopped walking to explain. *"That's 'Shateki.' It's just a prize stall, honestly. You aim and shoot at what you want, and if you knock it down, you keep it."*

Juliana scanned the lineup in curiosity. There was everything from masks to plush toys, and that's when she saw–a Furret plush, sitting neatly on the top shelf and basically calling the young girl's name.

Without much of a second thought, she started getting in line with her companions close behind. The prize in question was relatively large, so it wouldn't be hard to hit. She might have trouble knocking it down depending on its weight and the force of the corks being launched in it's direction, but nothing a try or two couldn't manage. Juliana was *very* confident in her aim.

Which was why missing the plush by a margin surprised her.

Well, it was to be expected. This *was* her first time playing a game like this, so she just had to get into the groove of things! Surely she'd get it the next time!

Another miss.

And another.

And one more.

Her latest attempt finally landed a hit, but as previously suspected, it wasn't enough force to knock the plush down, much to the girl's dismay. She started rummaging through her

pocket for another try, only to realize she was quickly running out of money.

"Um, Juliana? Maybe I can give it a try?" Kieran's voice broke her out of her mental prison. He must have noticed her hesitation, because he gave her a reassuring smile while holding a hand out. "It's okay. I've played these before, so I might be able to loosen it up for you."

Finding nothing but sincerity in his eyes, Juliana conceded with a sigh of defeat as she handed the wooden rifle to her companion. "Guess I'm destined to rely on the experts for this one…"

Kieran chuckled nervously while scratching his cheek. "T-That's not it! These are really tricky if you've never played before. It'll take me a few tries to get it, if I even do…"

After paying for another round, the raven's focus went back to the stall while holding the rifle with his hands. His expression turned to one of pure concentration, gaze unwavering as his eyes were fixated on the plush that rested on the top shelf. It was strange to see him so serious, but Juliana wasn't one to complain.

And so, with an exhale and precise aim, the boy let his finger pull the trigger.

The plush fell instantly.

The trio stared at the outcome with mouths agape, not daring to break the silence that surrounded them.

It was the man in charge of the stall that ended up bringing everyone back from their shock. He held the Furret plush out to the raven with a large smile on his face. "Congratulations, Kieran! Another victory under your belt!"

Kieran's expression seemed to short circuit as red painted over his cheeks. He kept shifting from the prize to Juliana while waving his hands around in embarrassment. "N-No! I-I mean, I didn't– I *swear* I didn't mean to show off! T-These are usually

super hard so it takes more than a single shot, and you must have loosened it up by the time I hit it, so–"

"Are you kidding me?! That was so cool!" The brunette's eyes stared in awe at the boy, but almost instantly shifted to an awkward shuffle as she scratched at the back of her neck with a giggle. "If anything, that means I need more practice. I really wanted to win that for you since you have a Furret on your team, but I guess you got it anyway so it was a win-win, hehe…"

"H-Huh? You wanted to win it for *me*?" Kieran's eyes widened in disbelief while fidgeting with the Furret plush now resting in his hands.

"*Ugh*, we get it! Kiki's a pro at festival games and *you're* an amateur!" Carmine finally decided to make herself known once more, placing money on the stand with a huff as she practically snatched the toy rifle out of her brother's grasp. "I'm not falling behind!"

The older of the three ended up winning a second Furret plush for the Paldean, claiming that 'she deserved one too and next time she should be a little more selfish and get something *she* wanted!' It was honestly incredibly sweet and made Juliana feel much less embarrassed over the whole ordeal.

Even if neither of them would admit it out loud.

Next stop on their tour was the almighty Ogre Oustin'!

According to Kieran's explanation, it was a traditional Kitakami event in which participants would recreate the legendary battle between The Loyal Three and the Ogre. People would mount Cyclizar and pop balloons colored after the Ogre's fabled masks, which contained all kinds of native berries. The more berries you had by the time the timer ran out, the better.

"Big Sis always drags me along to make sure her high score is still intact." The raven huffed that last bit, keeping his voice low to try and prevent Carmine from hearing. Of course, that wasn't the case.

"I've had the number one spot on the leaderboard for years! There's *no way* I'm not defending my title if it comes to it, you squirt!" The teen replied while shooting her brother a silent death glare as they eventually found their way into the arena.

It was a large outdoor area covered in colorful balloons as far as the eye could see—wild Pokémon were also allowed and let loose in its midst, since they served as another obstacle for the players to complete their challenge. Cyclizar were playing off to the side, presumably awaiting for any eager participant.

Carmine's eyes shone in anticipation, holding her hands in fists as she approached the sign-up booth. "Alright, it's time! This year I'm breaking my *own* record—all thanks to your giant lizard!"

Juliana was left confused for a moment as to why the siblings were staring at her in anticipation, until she finally remembered.

She promised Carmine she'd let her use Miraidon for the event.

Apparently any Pokémon that could move fast enough was allowed in Ogre Oustin'; you didn't have to use Cyclizar if you didn't want to. So after meeting the robotic lizard for the first

time, apparently one of the older girl's first thoughts was how useful it would be for this particular event.

The Paldean had agreed earlier since she honestly didn't even know what Ogre Oustin' was at the time, but now that she knew it was a competitive game… well, she was starting to have some concerns. Miraidon wasn't always the most cooperative of Pokémon—she of all people would know that, after all. Also pairing him up with someone like Carmine could be… complicated, to say the least.

As if sensing the brunette's hesitation, the teen approached her with hands on her hips and a frown on her face. "Hey, don't you even *think* about backing out of a promise, you hear me?"

Juliana waved her hands in front of herself in defense. "I-I wasn't thinking about that! I guess I'm just worried that Miraidon… won't be able to keep up."

Carmine's face then changed to one of confidence, a smirk tugging at her lips as she began rummaging through her bag. "*Please!* All Pokémon function essentially the same—all they need is a *little* motivation!" After saying that, the teen proceeded to pull out the item she was searching for.

A cloth-wrapped sandwich.

Not even a second went by before the familiar flash of her robotic lizard's Poké Ball blinded them momentarily. Miraidon sat at the ready with a wagging tail and an eager stance that could put Professor Jacq to shame. Juliana could only shake her head in mild amusement—that was her legendary, alright.

It was surprisingly quick to get Carmine and Miraidon on the same page, with much help from the teen's instructions and directions, as well as sandwiches. *Lots* of sandwiches.

Eventually, the duo found themselves entering the arena and beginning their round. Juliana and Kieran cheered from the sidelines at the display of speed and accuracy being portrayed. If no one knew better, they'd think those two were partners in real life.

After the final tally score, Carmine could only cheer at being able to surpass her number by a margin. Or at least the feeling lasted for a moment, since not a minute later, the booth manager mentioned they had to change the score due to a large number of berries missing from their final run, much to everyone's confusion.

No one took notice of the giant purple lizard happily licking his lips.

"This one's for you!"

"Thanks! It looks so yummy!"

After an afternoon filled with so many fun activities, everyone finally settled to get ready for the fireworks show. Carmine left to use the restroom while tasking the younger duo with finding a good spot to sit as well as getting their candy appled snacks.

Kieran rambled about this particular stall that was his favorite, and after taking a bite of the apple he brought her, Juliana could see why—the sweetness of the caramel wasn't overwhelming enough to cover the sour, which made the perfect combo for a treat such as this.

"Today's been lots of fun…" Kieran spoke softly beside her, almost inaudible among the hustle and bustle of the people around them. He twirled his own candy apple between his fingers, staring at it with a fond smile the girl hadn't seen before. "Thanks for agreeing to come with us. It means a lot."

The Paldean could sense a strange shift in tone in Kieran's voice, and if the way he continued to eye his snack was any indication, he appeared to be deep in thought. Whatever it was, she couldn't help but rival his smile with one of her own as she bumped shoulders with him. "No need to thank me. If anything, *I* should be the one thanking you guys—it was the most fun I've had in a while!"

Kieran appeared to snap out of his trance due to the physical contact, which brought another small blush across his cheeks as he giggled in glee. "Well, I'm gonna go get Big Sis' apple before she comes back, otherwise she'll kill us before we can even call it a night."

Just like that, the boy walked off towards the stall once more, leaving the brunette to happily munch on her sweet treat as she waited.

She must have been more out of it than she thought, since the voice that called next to her almost had her jumping out of her skin.

"He's not wrong, you know?" Carmine rested her elbows on the railing of their quaint spot.

"Huh? What do you mean?" Juliana raised an eyebrow questioningly in her direction.

"About this outing meaning a lot to him—well, *us*." The teen's gaze lingered on her younger brother who patiently waited in line, counting the money in his pouch with his tongue sticking out. A smile decorated her features as they softened in a way the brunette had never seen before. But there was also another emotion swelling in those amber eyes.

One Juliana knew far too well.

"Ever since our parents passed, Kiki's wanted to bring new people to the festival with us. He doesn't have many friends at school, so it's usually just the two of us…" Finally, Carmine turned to look at her companion as she rested her cheek against her hand. "Which is why you agreeing to tag along got him so excited. And I guess me too, a little… So yeah, thanks for that."

The girl could only stare wide-eyed at the words. She shifted under the teen's watchful gaze while pulling at the hem of her jinbei. "I'm so sorry to hear that… My dad, he's… also not around anymore, so I kinda get the feeling. My friends are my family, so I'm always happy to spend time with them. Like today!"

Carmine rolled her eyes and playfully punched her shoulder. "No need to be weird about it. I'm the same."

"What are you two talking about?" Kieran finally arrived– candy apple in hand and a confused expression on his face. The older of the three brushed it off as 'girl talk' just in time before the first set of fireworks went off.

As Juliana stared at the beautiful colors painting the night sky, she could only feel gratitude in her heart for being able to spend this time with the people she'd grown to care for.

As such, no one could've suspected that a small Grass-Type Pokémon was closely watching them from a distance.

End

The Fury of an Adorable Ogre

Written By: SaimatsuShipper
Spot art by: Moni

The school trip between Naranja and Blueberry Academies were the most eventful weeks of my life. I made some new friends, attended a shrine festival, temporarily became the Blueberry Academy Champion (before I quickly gave the title back to Drayton after explaining how Kieran nearly wiped out my whole team), got to explore the true secrets of the Terastal phenomenon, and dealt with a brief cursed mochi outbreak. I would say that wraps up these adventures...

...if a certain *someone* wasn't being very stubborn.

"GRAH! Pon PON!!!"

A few days after returning to Paldea, I decided to treat my new Pokemon friends to a sandwich picnic with Koraidon. But once they all came out of their Pokeballs, Ogerpon quickly spotted Pecharunt and proceeded to repeatedly bonk him with her cudgel. Then Okidogi, Munkidori, and Fezandipiti interfered to restrain Ogerpon, but that only made things worse. Which brings us to the present, with Ogerpon angrily chasing all four poison-type Pokemon.

Of course, the only ones who didn't get involved were Koraidon, who was happily munching on an extra-spicy sandwich, and Terapagos, who was nearly in tears from seeing all this chaos. But I knew this wouldn't work out going forward. I was going to have to make sure Ogerpon got along with Pecharunt. Luckily, I knew just who to call. So I took out my Rotom phone and dialed a certain number.

"Juliana?" Carmine asked. "What's up?"

"It's Ogerpon," I explained. "She hasn't adjusted to her new teammate."

"How so?" Carmine wondered.

I responded by flipping my Rotom phone's camera to show the still-ongoing chase. But by then, Ogerpon had jumped onto Pecharunt and was kicking him as he tried to shake her off. As for the Lousy Trio, they were panicked and desperately tried to calm their superior down. I could see Carmine's surprised expression as she witnessed the unplanned chaos.

"Do you know what caused this?" Carmine asked.

"No clue," I answered as I flipped the phone's camera once more so it was facing me. "I was hoping to stop by your place for some answers. Maybe your grandfather told you or Kieran if there was more to Ogerpon's story."

"I don't think so," Carmine said after a bit of thinking. "That story only mentioned the Lousy Three. There was no fourth Pokemon mentioned at all."

"Then we might have to do some investigating," I decided. Thankfully, I knew just where to start.

Ever since Koraidon learned how to properly fly, traveling between Paldea and Kitakami was a lot easier than using a plane. So once I returned my other Pokemon to their Pokeballs, I boarded my trusted red-scaled mount and headed over to

the island region. Of course, once I landed in Mossui Town, the locals were quick to avoid me as much as possible. I guess riding a giant Pokemon everywhere I go can leave a certain impression on others.

I arrived at the siblings' house in a matter of minutes. Both Carmine and Kieran were here, with Kieran playing with his Furret. Given how he was present, it seemed Carmine must have explained everything to him regarding my sudden visit.

"Juliana!" Kieran happily exclaimed once he spotted me. "You're here!"

I dismounted Koraidon and returned him to his Pokeball. "Thanks for letting me stop by," I said.

"So how is she?" Kieran asked, referring to Ogerpon.

"I have no clue," I admitted. "She's been like this ever since I caught Pecharunt." I took out her Heal Ball. "It was just like what happened during the mochi outbreak."

"It couldn't have been that bad," Carmine assumed. Then she noticed Kieran's worried expression. "What? Did this happen while I was out or something?"

"I remember hearing an angry scream when Juliana was confronting Pecharunt," Kieran recalled as his Furret snuggled up to his legs. He looked back at me. "Was that Ogerpon?"

I slowly nodded in response. "She jumped out of her Heal Ball before I could bring out Clodsire," I explained. "Then she put on her Cornerstone Mask and repeatedly smacked Pecharunt with her cudgel. I haven't seen her this angry ever since we confronted Okidogi, Munkidori, and Fezandipiti."

"We could try to ask Ogerpon what happened," Kieran suggested.

"Oh, like you think we can understand what she says?" Carmine pointed out. "Cause unless you suddenly learned how to speak ogre, I don't think that plan will work."

"It doesn't hurt to try," I hoped. Maybe I could try to read Ogerpon's body language...

Taking a deep breath, I pressed the Heal Ball's button and opened it. In a flash of dark pink light and sparkles, Ogerpon emerged with a cheerful 'Pon!'. Then her eyes widened upon realizing where she was and she eagerly ran over to Carmine and Kieran.

"It's nice to see you, too," Carmine replied with a small laugh. "But Juliana didn't come here to play."

"Pon?" Ogerpon asked with a slight head tilt. She turned to face me.

"We just want to ask why you don't like Pecharunt," I explained as I slowly took out Pecharunt's Pokeball. "So-"

"PON!"

WHACK!

Before I could finish my sentence, Ogerpon whipped out her cudgel and used it to angrily smack Pecharunt's Pokeball out of my grasp, leaving a red bruise mark on my hand. She was heaving in raw fury as she pointed that same cudgel at the Pokeball, ready to smack it senselessly much like what she did with Pecharunt himself. Thankfully, I took action and gently patted her head. With my gentle touch, she was able to finally relax.

"That's better," I spoke in a soothing tone, slowly withdrawing my hand. "Now can you tell us why you're so angry?"

Ogerpon's gaze switched between me and Pecharunt's Pokeball. With a quick nod, she took a few steps back before making some unusual gestures. She kept on saying 'Pon!' as she swung her cudgel, but I was unable to figure out what she was saying. What a strange game of charades.

After a while, Ogerpon started to get frustrated from the lack of communication. She kicked the dirt ground before her gaze slowly switched towards her cudgel. With a sudden triumphant 'Pon!', she used the same cudgel to...draw a picture? Why was she doing that?

By the time Ogerpon was finished with her picture, she said 'Pon pon!' as she eagerly tapped her foot. But when I looked at the picture with Carmine and Kieran, the three of us were equally confused. It was a crude sketch of a short tree, a peach-shaped orb, and scary-looking images of a bird, dog, and monkey. It took a while for us to realize what it was. Apparently, Ogerpon drew herself fighting Pecharunt and the Lousy Three. But this picture felt a bit off. Like Carmine said, there were only *three* thieves who were after those masks, not four. It seemed like we were going to have to do some more investigating. Thankfully, it seemed Carmine and Kieran were in agreement.

"So now what?" Carmine asked. "Are we gonna play detectives to figure out what happened?"

"I guess so," I replied with a shrug. "I just don't know where to begin."

Kieran put his hand to his chin in deep thought. "We could try to figure out where Pecharunt came from," he suggested. "So we should try to head for Peachy's."

"Was that where you two first saw him?" Carmine asked.

"It was," I answered. "The shopkeeper might be our first lead."

Luckily, the walk to Peachy's was a short distance since the shop was close to where Carmine and Kieran live. The shopkeeper was present, along with the familiar Vulpix sleeping on the awning. She wasn't helping any customers, so it looked like she was free to chat.

"Lovely of you to stop by," the shopkeeper greeted. "How may I help you?"

"We're here to ask about a certain Pokemon," I explained. I paused to glance towards Carmine, who had her hand rested on Ogerpon's head. I gave Carmine a quick nod before looking back at the shopkeeper. "Are you familiar with this little guy?"

I proceeded to take out Pecharunt's Pokeball and opened it. The familiar purple and round shape emerged with a flash of pale blue light and he greeted with his usual cry of 'Pecha!'. Predictably, Ogerpon was furious, but Carmine was quick to keep her calm. So with that taken care of, I gestured Pecharunt towards the shopkeeper, who stared at him for a few minutes. Eventually, she finally spoke.

"So that's where my shop's good luck doll went!" the shopkeeper exclaimed. "I didn't know it was a sleeping Pokemon this whole time!"

"Good luck doll...?" I repeated.

"Oh yes," the shopkeeper insisted. She patted towards a small red pillow on the counter. "It was sitting right here some time ago. But for some odd reason, it had disappeared without explanation. Right after your friend called you, in fact."

That I remembered. Last time I was here, I noticed the 'good luck doll' moved a bit right before Arven called me asking if we could hang out, then the 'doll' weirdly disappeared after the Rotom phone call. But if that really was Pecharunt, why would he suddenly spring to life? It felt all too...weird...

Hang on...

Didn't Briar give me a Mythical Pecha Berry as an apology gift for what happened in Area Zero's Underdepths? It disappeared from its wooden box during the mochi invasion, so what if Pecharunt recovered after somehow stealing it from my bag? I would have to scold him about it, but I had to figure out his backstory first.

"How long have you had Pecharunt?" I asked, hoping to get some kind of time estimation.

"Ever since this little shop has been open," the shopkeeper answered. "It has been in my family for six generations. My dear good luck doll has been the heart of the shop, even being the reason behind its name."

"So about 120 years ago," I realized.

"Peh?" Pecharunt muttered, looking unusually surprised.

Kieran was the first to notice something was amiss. "What's wrong, Pecharunt?" he asked.

Pecharunt trembled a bit as he stared at the now-barren red pillow. Why did he look so distraught? Was it something I said? Whatever it was, I could see tears brimming from his eyes until...

"WAAAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!"

That surprised everyone. Me, Kieran, Carmine, the shopkeeper... Even Ogerpon before she quickly put on her Cornerstone Mask and switched to her rock-type cloak. I couldn't blame her for getting defensive. According to my Rotom Phone, Pecharunt knows the move Fake Tears to lure opponents into letting down their guard. This ear-piercing wail could be that move in action, and yet...something felt a little off.

Was this an actual cry of grief?

After saying goodbye to Peachy's shopkeeper, we headed back to Carmine and Kieran's house to try and calm Pecharunt down. Unfortunately, no matter how hard we tried, nothing seemed to work. Just what exactly was getting him so upset? Did it have to do with finding out about how long he was sleeping?

"Just great," Carmine sighed. "What now?"

Ogerpon, on the other hand, slowly took off her mask as she carefully approached the crying peach-shaped Pokemon. Then with a forced smile, she did her best to comfort him, patting his head as she muttered 'pon' as if she was saying 'there, there'. Of course, none of us knew why she would do such a thing,

considering her dislike towards him. Maybe it was something Pecharunt said as he cried?

Surprisingly, that actually worked. After a few more head pats, Pecharunt finally calmed down. "Cha..." he sadly muttered, dropping his head downward.

"Is everything okay?" Kieran asked. He turned to face Ogerpon. "Why was Pecharunt crying?"

Ogerpon got back on her feet and proceeded to draw with her cudgel once more. Only this time, she drew a peach-shaped orb floating next to what seemed to be an elderly couple, along with a couple of items depicting food and clothing. The peach-shaped orb was obviously Pecharunt, but as for the other sketches...

"What do you think this is about?" I wondered.

Carmine carefully checked the picture. "These must have been Pecharunt's trainers," she guessed.

"It doesn't look like that to me," Kieran guessed. "They could have been more like human parents. Maybe Pecharunt was adopted?"

"Sure, but that doesn't explain the other items," Carmine pointed out.

I thought back to the mochi invasion. "Pecharunt's mochi drew out the desires of others," I recalled, remembering how Nemona's battle eagerness was left intact. "He might have given the mochi to those two people, which brought out their materialistic desire. Being a good kid, Pecharunt must have got those items for them."

"Then the masks..." Carmine realized.

"Pon pon," Ogerpon confirmed.

At that moment, realization hit all three of us. If Pecharunt's claims were true, that meant he and the Lousy Trio were after Ogerpon's masks because his adopted parents asked for them. Then those four came to Kitakami, only to get attacked by Ogerpon. It lined up with her side of the story pretty well. But if Pecharunt really was asleep since that ambush...

Oh Pecharunt...

I decided to take a picture of Ogerpon's drawing. "We should show this to your grandfather," I told Carmine and Kieran. "Everyone in Kitakami needs to know this side of the story."

Carmine and Kieran both agreed with me. This seemingly untold story had to be shared with all of the villagers. Between people mistaking the Lousy Trio as noble guardians, recent revelations regarding Ogerpon and her original trainer, and now Pecharunt coming to Kitakami because of what his adopted parents wanted, this completed story needed to be told. And with the three of us taking action, I just knew people will be able to look at Pecharunt from a different light.

End

Penpals

Written By: Charley

For a while, Kieran considers just biting the bullet and asking his grandparents if he can get a phone. Carmine has one now, and considering it's just months until she graduates and moves away, he'd like to be able to speak with her. Even though he has money from all his battling and can pay for it himself, he finds the words dying in his throat every time he tries to speak on the matter. In the end, he keeps his desires to himself.

He tells himself it's so he can talk to Carmine, but really, there is someone else he wants to speak to. Someone he owes a debt to, far away in Paldea. It feels even further now that he's back at home in Kitakami. He wants to ask Juliana if she would like to come to Kitakami again. He wants to say he's sorry again, properly this time, now that he's completely calmed down.

She could bring her friends, too – she mentioned them a lot when she was here before. He'd like to meet them – especially the one that was obsessed with battling. He hasn't battled at all since he returned to Kitakami, mostly on Director Cyrano's orders, but also because the mere thought of it drains him.

Kieran sits at his desk, paper and pen in front of him. He'll have to write to Juliana. He asked Carmine if he could phone Juliana on her phone, but she said she didn't have her number.

Whether or not Carmine was lying, Kieran can't tell; she's been on her phone every second of the day since she got it last year.

He doesn't have Juliana's address either, he realises. Perhaps he can send Gliscor off with the letter, like they used to with homing Pidove years ago. He doesn't have much faith in Gliscor's tracking ability, but it's all he has at the moment. None of that matters, though, until he writes the letter.

Dear Juliana, he begins. That's how letters start. He stares at the words on the page for a few moments, sets his pen down, and goes to make a cup of tea. When he returns, the words continue to stare at him. He sips his tea, his eyes going out of focus, and then sets his cup down and lifts the pen and starts to write.

It's been a while. I hope you're doing well. Summer's coming up soon – is the weather in Paldea nice during the summer? It gets warmer here, but it's not too warm. The mountains are still pretty cold, actually. Grandma and Grandpa took us to Olivine City one year for summer holidays – they have beaches there, proper ones, not like the pebbly ones we have by the river here. Like, beside the sea! I don't know if you've ever been to Olivine City, but I recommend it. I'll have to come to Paldea some time and check out the beaches there.

Kieran stares at the paper again. What on earth is he talking about? Beaches? That has nothing to do with anything. Juliana will not care about his opinion on the beaches in southern Johto. He crumples up the paper and puts it in the bin.

Once again, Kieran finds himself sitting at the kitchen table as his grandmother makes the dinner. The house is quiet; Carmine still at school, grandpa out for his evening walk. Kieran bites his tongue, the topic of getting a phone of his own bubbling somewhere within him, eager to get out. It'd keep him safe when he's out in the wilds training. He could phone home easier when he's at school. He could keep in contact with Carmine,

and his friends, and make new friends, even. Well thought out arguments die on his tongue as soon as Hideko turns around. She puts dinner out, and the opportunity is lost.

"Can I use the phone?" Kieran asks, referring to the ancient piece of equipment that sits in the hall.

"Who are you calling?" Hideko asks in reply.

"I wanted to call the school. I… want to call Juliana. You know, the girl from Paldea who was here last summer. I don't have her contacts, and Carmine says she doesn't either and I thought-"

"It's a bit late to be making calls, Kieran. In the morning, yes."

"It's the morning there, though! Eleven… or thereabouts. I need to call while there's someone in the office."

"Okay," Hideko acquiesces. When his plate is cleared, Kieran scampers into the hall. Yukito washes the dishes, and Hideko sits in the living room, clearly listening in on Kieran's conversation. He turns his back to her, hoping for a little amount of privacy.

He calls Carmine first, not totally convinced that she was telling the truth when she said that she didn't have Juliana's number. She's in class, she hisses down the phone, and she only answered because she thought it was an emergency. Kieran apologises, and although she sighs and huffs, she still tacks her usual 'love you' onto the end of the call.

The office is next on the list, which Kieran dreads, as he knows the people in the office can be unhelpful. He remembers their faces when he was brought in by Director Cyrano in floods of tears, sitting by while they unenrolled him for the year. As predicted, they aren't particularly helpful, but they do put him through to the Director after much complaining.

"Kieran! How can I help you? I hope you're doing well back home."

"I am, thank you. I wanted to write to Juliana, and … apologise for what went down. What I did. But I don't have her address, and I don't have her number, and…"

"You understand I can't just *give* you her details, right? It'd be a total breach of confidentiality."

"Of course!" Kieran splutters. It's not true – he hadn't realised that all. And he should have, he supposes.

"I can, however, ask Juliana if she would mind if I gave you her address. How does that sound?"

"Yes! That's fine."

"There we go then, another problem solved. I'll let you know when I hear back from her, Kieran. And all the best with your continuing recovery."

"Thank you."

The line goes dead before he can think of anything else to say.

Dear Juliana, starts the second attempt.

This is Kieran. I am at home in Kitakami. I hope you are doing well. I have read Ms Briar's new book. It is good to hear that you let the researchers take Terapagos. I am sure they will be able to learn a lot more.

Terrible, he thinks. In trying not to be overly sentimental or come across as too worried about what Juliana thinks of him, he sounds like a robot. He puts the page in the bin, and starts again. His pen hovers over the paper before he even begins to write.

Dear Juliana,

Words escape him. Maybe he was on the right track with the next part of the second draft?

This is Kieran.

His name won't be anywhere else, and she doesn't know he's going to write, and she doesn't know his handwriting. This is the logical choice.

I hope you're doing well.

That's enough for now, Kieran thinks. Best not to tackle the whole thing at once, lest he run out of paper with a million more failed drafts. He'll leave his thoughts to marinate a little longer in his brain.

"You're an idiot," Carmine tells him, dumping her bags on the floor of the hallway. Usually, Kieran would be upset by her insults, but he agrees on this occasion, so he just dashes towards her for a hug. Even without looking at her, he knows what expression she has on her face – she's rolling her eyes, but she's also smiling.

"Did you get it?" He asks.

"Of course. Give me a second though, it's in my bag. I thought you told me they were going to email it to you?"

"They were, but then Director Cyrano said something about it not being totally secure, and… I don't know. It didn't really make sense to me."

"I think he's just being annoying. Those computers are totally secure."

"And you would know, because…"

"Because I'm an adult now, Kiki." She has that smug look on her face that he hasn't seen for a while. From the top of her bag she pulls out a brown cardboard envelope, and from that she procures her official Blueberry Academy certificate, proving that she graduated from the top school in Unova.

"I think you're an adult because of your birthday, not because of school," Hideko says fondly, appearing out of the living room to hug her granddaughter.

"Well, that too," Carmine says with a laugh.

"And you're not staying for long," Hideko complains. "Back to Unova in September."

"I know, I know."

"Into the working world… Your mother's family will be glad to see you. It's a shame we won't get to see you as often."

"You and grandpa will have to come on a holiday sometime! Over the winter break maybe, when Kiki will still be there too!"

"We just might have to plan that," Hideko agrees, her eyes falling on a nervously bouncing Kieran. "Oh, Carmine, stop being so mean to your poor brother. Give him the letter from the Director. It's all he's talked about all week!"

"Juliana's a hard person to get in contact with, you know," Carmine says, rummaging through her bag. "Couldn't call her or email her, and since she's between the dorms at her school and her mum's house, it took ages for them to get her information." She finds the envelope and presents it to Kieran with a flourish.

"Thank you!" Kieran says, though he's well aware Carmine is just the messenger.

Juliana's details are laid out on the page – full name, address, Uva Academy email, and her mom's house phone number. The last line has a handwritten addendum, presumably by Director Cyrano – 'For emergencies ONLY!'. But the address will suit him just fine – he just has to hope that his letter arrives at a time when Juliana is home.

"Can I be excused?" Kieran asks, clutching the letter like a lifeline.

"Dinner in half an hour," Hideko tells him, and he nods, scampering off to his room.

The next draft also does not go so well. Kieran gave up on it quickly, preferring to spend time that evening with Carmine instead. But this morning Carmine is in her room doing whatever it is that Carmine does, and so Kieran puts his headphones on, and pulls out his special writing paper – one with a Yanma print on it – and settles down to write. This is the last draft, and he will get it right this time.

Dear Juliana,

This is Kieran! I got your details from school, though I think you know that. I was thinking about sending an email, but writing a letter is more fun, don't you think? Maybe it's just because I'm young – granny loves to email me when I'm away at school.

I just wanted to write to apologise again for all that I dragged you through last term. The school and Carmine have helped me out since then, and though I've taken a break, I am feeling a lot better, and getting ready to go back.

But we've got summer ahead of us, and I was wondering if you'd like to come and hang out in Kitakami again? I've enclosed some tickets – you can bring your friends from Paldea! I'm really looking forward to meeting them - especially Nemona, if she likes battling as much as you said she did.

The summer festival will be great again this year, and I'd really like Ogerpon to be there for her first festival as not the villain of the story. But if you're not available, I understand – it's a lot to ask, and not a lot of notice.

Anyway, I hope to hear from you soon. I don't have a phone, which I guess makes getting back to me a bit harder. But you can write back to me, or contact Carmine if you have her details (she says she doesn't have yours, but I don't really believe her).

All the best,

Your friend Kieran

Finally satisfied, if not completely happy, with the results, Kieran folds the letter up, and puts it in a matching Yanma envelope. He carefully writes Juliana's name and address on it, and hurries out of the house and towards the community centre to send it before he can change his mind. He buys a stamp from Peachy's, and posts it through the gap on the postbox. He stands for a moment, pondering if he's made a mistake. But then he smiles – hopefully, it won't be too long until he sees Juliana again.

End

Sana Sana Colita de Rana

Written By: EV

Slowly, Juliana put one foot ahead of the other, climbing up the steps to Kitakami Hall whilst her charge followed behind her dutifully. Ogerpon huddled close, nearly bumping into her legs on the brief moments where Juliana paused to check that the Pokémon was still with her—and, admittedly, so that she could have a moment to rest her poor legs too. Juliana had been up and on her feet that entire trip, and while she was certainly an active person normally, her fatigue was starting to catch up to her.

The strain was worth it, however, knowing that it was a byproduct of the combined efforts of Carmine, Kieran, and her fighting to return the rightful property back to its mistreated ogre of an owner.

Besides, it also paled in comparison to the first time that she climbed these steps, nearly out of breath and honestly still huffing and puffing just before meeting up with Kieran at the second signpost. Juliana was grateful that she had pushed past the exhaustion to take a great photo with her friend, with nary a hair out of place… after she finagled her sweaty locks into place with a quick finger-comb through, using her hat as a temporary fan.

It was an easier climb that night too, although that might have been from the excitement of attending the Festival of Masks with Kieran. Juliana was certain that she'd have just as much fun if she had tagged along with her classmates Gabriel, Manuela, and Jordi as they had gotten to know each other a little on the flight to Kitakami—although Gabriel seemed rather irked at her getting commandeered by his partner for the exchange—but it just felt special going with Kieran, especially as she wore the jinbei Hideko gifted her.

Nothing would beat that first night, climbing up the lantern-lit stone steps in her sandals. And the sight that greeted her when she reached the top simply took her breath away. The air was warm from the heat of tightly packed bodies and candles. Juliana watched as children raced from stall to stall wearing festival masks of their favorite Pokémon. Different colored paper lanterns were strung up on banisters, casting a warm yellow light over everyone. Juliana had envied the adults with paper fans, flapping a breeze onto their faces to stave off sweat, wishing she could do the same. The aroma of all the festival foods followed her no matter where she went, salivating at the tempting fried noodles and the refreshing coolness of ice cream.

To think that a night full of so much joy could swiftly cause change to ripple throughout Mossui Town and Kitakami as a whole. And now here she was, walking side by side with the Mask Pokémon to escort her back to her den.

Juliana would climb a hundred more steps just for her new friend, if it meant that no Pokémon would suffer again. It was an especially apt oath when faced with the uphill hike that was the road to Oni Mountain where she would drop off Ogerpon safe and sound in the Dreaded Den.

Despite knowing it was the right course of action, Juliana still frowned as a bad taste in her mouth formed at the idea of leaving such a sweet creature behind there—even if it was her sanctuary for so many years. She couldn't help the reaction as she still remembered vividly the first time that she had made

the trip up to meet with Kieran. At the time, Juliana couldn't help the way that her chest clenched as she stood in front of that sign:

DANGER – DO NOT ENTER

And no matter how much she reasoned with herself, the uneasy feeling did not relent the higher up and further away the narrow path took her. It was such an isolated area, for such a tiny creature; but it was home to Ogerpon, and far be it from Juliana to deny such comforts to a being so wronged by her fellow humans.

Still, as a small little act of rebellion, Juliana purposefully went out of her way to take the long road back to the den, intent on spending as much time with Ogerpon as possible. Carmine and Kieran had gone on ahead without her as usual, and so she didn't have to worry about getting rushed—as well meaning as it would have been.

Having finally reached the top and standing just under the torii gates, Juliana could feel Ogerpon lean around her legs to peer at the festival. It was clear that all of the excitement of the day hadn't dismissed the deep desire from the creature to attend.

Juliana thought back to their first meeting, one that was born entirely by chance but one she would never forget for years to come. It was clear that despite the legends and slander, the villagers had long forgotten just what the Ogre looked like for her to have confidently scampered down the mountain to the outskirts of Kitakami Hall. With the truth smudged and lost to time, Ogerpon must have realized that she could once again operate under that brief return to anonymity of the masks that she and her human had before the Loyal Three came and ruined everything. It was clear in the way that she bore her mask but still strayed by the outskirts of Kitakami Hall.

So then, what must Ogerpon have felt in that moment when she lost her mask, Juliana ruminated. In her eyes, Juliana must have seemed like a wonder herself, a villager who did not shy or

scream at the sight of her maskless appearance but rather tried to return it. At that moment, did she think that the village had changed? That she would be welcome? And how did she feel now, knowing that her slim almost defiant bit of hope was true.

Until she had met those Lousy Three—far be it from her to let Carmine know that her clever bit of wordplay had firmly stuck itself in her mind—Juliana hadn't realized that Pokémon could be such unrepentant bullies. Even now she still couldn't believe that the caretaker had just *handed over* the masks to those villains upon their abrupt reappearance, not at all questioning the circumstance behind it. But at least he and everyone else now knew the truth about their dear Ogre, and so she would never have to fear theft of what was rightfully hers again.

As such, Juliana looked down and told Ogerpon, "If you'd like, we can spend some time exploring. I'm sure that the others won't mind us taking a teeny tiny detour." With a wink, she added, "I'll just tell them that a fiery Salazzle wouldn't leave us alone until I battled it."

Unsure, Ogerpon glanced at the festival ahead and then back at her. Hesitantly, she stepped out from behind Juliana's shadow and walked out into the spotlight. Ogerpon swayed back and forth, slowly at first, before gaining energy as she took in each stall. With a jaunty walk, Ogerpon wandered further in and started to stray toward the first stand on the left—Shaved Ice Flavors as the sign proclaimed it as.

Juliana knew that it couldn't possibly compete with Ogerpon's memories of attending with her caretaker nor would it match that first experience she herself had, partially because it was the middle of an overcast day. She had a sinking feeling that it would rain soon, causing all of the vendors to pack up early. Sighing, she figured that it was perhaps for the best. Ogerpon was still adjusting to no longer having to cower in fear at the sight of the villagers and Mossui Town, and would hopefully come out from under her shell without crowds of people whispering about and staring at her.

It would take time for everyone involved to heal and adapt, that much was certain. Even now, every time that Ogerpon looked back at her with apprehension, Juliana did her best to give a reassuring smile—even extending her hand in an offering of physical support at one point. Her heart bled for the small creature, but it swelled with pride seeing how Ogerpon worked through her fear to continue forward without a safety net. How she had preserved her kindness and bravery after so much torment, Juliana didn't know but she admired it all the same.

As they walked down the path, it was clear that Ogerpon kept gravitating toward the Candy Fruit Stall. All that walking and running around had made Juliana peckish, so with a small call, she approached the vendor with her shy partner.

"You can get anything you'd like," Juliana said, double checking her funds. Her mother had given her more than enough money for her trip to purchase enough candy to make both of their stomachs sick.

Juliana purchased a stick of Rawst tanghulu for herself and waited patiently while Ogerpon deliberated. All of the options on display were safe for the consumption of both people and Pokémon—to her great relief, as she would have felt particularly scummy denying Ogerpon her chosen treat after saying she could have one.

Eventually, Ogerpon finally made her choice as she gravitated toward the brightly colored Candy Green Apple.

At that moment, Juliana couldn't stop from thinking about how excited Kieran had been to share one with her just the night before. It had been just before she saw Ogerpon for the first time and confused her for a child festival goer. At the time, she had blushed because of how close it was to a romantic gesture from her home region. Yet, the earnest spark in his eyes and his happiness to attend the festival with a friend had made the moment special to her.

With sorrow and regret, Juliana hoped that Kieran would be able to smile at her again like he had at that moment. It had

not gone past her that his mood had swiftly tanked when he discovered the deception from everyone that he cared about and who he thought cared about him in turn. While his rightful suspicion hurt, Juliana understood that he was in the right to lash out at her.

It had been with great reluctance that she was coerced into lying to him by Carmine and Yukito, and Juliana hoped that it came across in every lie she told from the tone of her voice to her body language and facial expressions. She still didn't understand the rationalization behind the farce, as she knew how much Kieran cared about the Ogre—she even suspected that it was due to some part of him feeling kinship of being ostracized, not at all helped by the constant ribbing from his overbearing sister. It was clear to her from how little time she spent in their company that there was a difference in age between the two that created a divide that neither sibling wanted. That was why she had wanted to tell him right away that she saw Ogerpon, hoping that with the discovery he would figure out that he wasn't as alone as he felt he was.

Kieran was a sweet kid and Juliana had told him as much the day before, she swore that she would never want to intentionally hurt him.

Perhaps, now that he had been the linchpin to clearing Ogerpon's good name, his mood would improve. Certainly, he knew now that without him they would have had a harder time seeking justice for the Ogre. If he still had doubts, Juliana would make sure to tell him all that and more herself.

And better yet, maybe they could reconcile.

Her thoughts on her wayward friend were interrupted as the vendor handed over the candied fruit, with a tri-way exchange of handing over the Candy Green Apple to Ogerpon and her money finding its new home with the vendor.

As they walked away, Ogerpon nibbled at the treat, eyes widening and letting out a shrill squeak of excitement before

descending upon the rest. Juliana slowly ate at her Rawst, teeth crunching against the hardened sugar and savoring the taste.

Soon enough they moved on and before she knew it, Ogerpon was dashing through the festival, swaying with absolute delight and chirruping frequently enough to almost seem like she was purring. A couple of kids had even stopped to offer her a game of ball after seeing Ogerpon turn away from the Ogre Oustin' game with dismay and dejection, causing delighted laughs to spill into the air as the Pokémon kicked the ball hard enough to send it flying through the fields.

Watching as Ogerpon smiled vibrantly, experiencing the world without fear for the first time in decades, Juliana felt her own spirit take flight.

If one thing was certain, this entire trip only served to reinforce the results of her independent study back at Uva Academy. As she told Director Clavell not too long ago, the greatest treasure she could have hoped to get out of her personal Treasure Hunt was the continued facilitation of creating bonds between people and Pokémon alike. All of the friends that she had made since moving to Paldea were dear to her heart–Arven, Nemona, Penny, Kieran and even Carmine– all of them bolstered her strength and determination to keep going and be the best Juliana she could be.

Juliana never backed down from a challenge, and endeavored to fight for what was right. It was only a natural conclusion for her to make an oath then and there that she would apologize to Kieran and make amends at the first opportunity that presented itself. She wasn't altogether sure when the moment to pull him aside for a quiet unobserved apology would be, but it was her sincerest hope that after they returned Ogerpon to the Dreaded Den, she would have the chance and not a moment later.

After all, Juliana had promised him that she would be the first contact in his Rotom Phone–once he got one–and a picnic to enjoy.

END

Goin' on a Beast Hunt, Gonna Catch a... Ferocious Beast?

Written By: Vivi (Octofae)
Spot art by: Amuerion & Aileen Catherine

The dew on the grass sparkled in the bright morning light as the sunbeams shone through the lush trees and sparkled on the standing water in the dense rice fields. The breeze wafted the scent of the apple trees in the orchard and the mud of the fields through the air.

It was still early, the suffocating humidity of the long summer day had yet to reach the peak of its index, and the morning temperature was still mild. A temporary paradise before the sweltering summer heat of the afternoon would arrive.

The shadow of Oni Mountain fell over Mossui Town, and Kieran groaned tiredly. He was anything *but* a morning person; it was too early for him to function.

Trudging along behind his sister, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes. "Why'd we have'ta get up so early?"

"*You're the one* who wanted to go look for the Bloodmoon Beast," Carmine emphasized as she cut her eyes at him. "Which means we have to leave *early* if we wanna have time to look for it."

"Oh. Right," he mumbled as he slouched while staying exactly two steps behind his sister.

"Come *on*, Kiki, don't be so grouchy," she said. "I told you last night I'd come with you, so here I am. You should be *thanking* me for waking you up."

Kieran sighed but took bigger steps to keep up with Carmine's longer stride. She acted as if she weren't curious or excited about finding it herself. *(She wouldn't have woken him up before eight a.m. on a Saturday morning if she wasn't invested.)*

After a beat of silence, his sister spoke again, "Let's get snacks for later."

"Oh! Yeah, good idea," Kieran agreed as he followed his sister and gradually became more awake. The fresh morning air helped—mud, apples, wildlife, and all.

"Naturally. It was *my* idea, after all."

Kieran waited for her to pat herself on the back. He was surprised that she didn't.

Their stop at Peachy's was short—his sister paid for their snacks—even as he filled his bag with an absurd amount of candy. He wasn't sure *why* Carmine rolled her eyes. She liked it too; inevitably, he'd be sharing it with her anyway.

As they left Peachy's, Carmine tousled his hair, "Now you're lookin' more alive, Kiki."

"Ugh! *Stop!!!*" He groaned as he swatted her hand away.

"Are you gonna make me?" His sister laughed at him as she walked away—several steps ahead—before she paused long enough to call over her shoulder, "Better keep up, or I'm leavin' ya here alone."

Then she took off in a sprint as if she were training for the Castelia City Marathon in Unova. *Ugh! There she goes.*

"Not fair!!" Kieran protested as he took off in a run to catch up with Carmine. "Your legs are *too long!*"

"My legs are perfect!" She yelled back, "Yours are just *too* short!"

Kieran huffed with annoyance as he chased after her and followed her out of town down Reveler's Road.

The Land of Kitakami was famous for the Festival of Masks, its sweet apples, and myths of rare Pokémon. Enthralled by the legends, many tourists wanted to visit the Timeless Woods to search for the *Bloodmoon Beast* that *supposedly* lived there. Though, much like the fabled Ogre that slayed the Loyal Three, there were no recorded sightings of the Bloodmoon Beast. Fables and Wives Tales.

It never stopped the occasional team of outsiders with a camera crew from stomping through the woods at night as they tried to find the elusive cryptid. Or, more recently—as of a few days ago, according to the whispers on the streets—a photographer from the Sinnoh Region.

Like the tourists, Kieran's luck with trying to see the Ogre every day of his life had been abysmal. Why he was persistent and thought he'd find *another* imaginary Pokémon in the woods was beyond Carmine's understanding. *But whatever*. She wasn't going to let him trek through the wilds by himself. The way he snuck off to run up Oni Mountain to visit the Dreaded Den was *bad* enough—the thought of Kieran wandering an entire forest by himself was *a nightmare*.

The pavement gave way to dirt as the path faded at the edge of Mossfell Confluence and, from there, the boggy wetlands where the slow-flowing waters were still low from the dry seasons that would refill once the rains came.

Fluffy white marshmallow clouds drifted overhead, casting shadows across the land as the bird Pokémon sang out as they soared in the skies.

They passed through the Mossfell Confluence and around the mountain into the outskirts of the Kitakami Wilds and continued on their way. The sun had gone from early to mid-morning by

the time they made it to the sloped entrance of the Timeless Woods.

Light filtered through the trees, shining like spotlights upon the lush foliage growing beneath. Something about the woodlands felt ancient, ethereal, eternal—untouched by time.

A historic sight from a primordial dawn.

"*Wowzers!*" Kieran breathed quietly as he took in the sight.

"Alright, Kiki, you're the *Beast* expert," Carmine said as she tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "Start investigating."

"I mean…" Kieran looked around the forest, "there's… really no tellin' *where* it could be."

"Obviously," his sister replied, lifting her hair off her neck and fanning her face with her hand, "which is why we gotta prioritize our searchin' spots. Where'd those outsiders on TV do their investigations?"

Kieran's face lit up, and his golden-yellow eyes sparkled with delight. "Well, they checked the caves and camped out in the woods," he paused. "Well…, *we're* not gonna camp." Then he shook his head. "Well, uh, let's find the water supply and see if we can find a cave."

"Mkay," she said. "Lead the way."

"Sure!" Kieran chirped as he took off, then stopped mid-step as a thought occurred to him.

A pause.

"You just wanna use me as bait so you get a head start on runnin' if we find something' doncha?"

"I'm too pretty to be eaten," Carmine replied with her entire chest. "Also, didn't Grandpa tell you about the tradition?"

"What tradition?"

"The Kitakami Sibling Code of Honor," she replied seriously as they started walking deeper into the forest together.

"What Code of Honor?" Kieran asked, arching an eyebrow.

"Ohhhh, he must not have told you yet…" she trailed off purposefully.

"Sounds to me like you're on a load of malarkey," he huffed.

"I was 'round your age when Grandpa gave me the talk. So I guess he just hasn't decided you're big enough for it. Oh well, that's sad for you, Kiki," she sighed. "Bummer. I thought you already knew…"

"Knew… what?"

"Well, according to Grandpa, the Kitakami Sibling Code of Honor is the highest test for a family. Not all sibling bonds are strong enough to handle it. It shows the unbreakable bond of siblings and that even when put to the test, siblings know they can count on each other."

Carmine sighed and looked away, holding one hand to her chest. "I probably shouldn't have said anything. I'm sure Grandpa would have told you on his own time, Kiki."

"There's a *test!?*" Kieran leaned in, curious.

"The last siblings who did the test in our family, well... there's a reason we only have Grandpa and Grandma now.... It turns out Dad wasn't an only child. His twin sister Leona…" she trailed off and sighed, bowing her head as she relaxed her arm. "No. I shouldn't say."

"What happened?"

Carmine looked both ways before leaning in super close to her brother.

She took a deep breath.

"*Our dear Aunt Leona… she…*" she whispered before speaking at her normal volume, "she…" Carmine wheezed softly before her voice went a pitch higher as she exclaimed, "I

can't believe you're *this* gullible!!" She dissolved into a giggle fit behind her hands. "You should have seen your face!! It was *priceless!*"

"Aww, man!! You're *wrong* for that!!" Kieran pouted and slumped over.

"How could you *not* tell I made that name up on the spot?" She laughed as she once again rushed off ahead of him.

"You are such a mean, stupid head!" Kieran yelled after her before he took off running to catch up. He silently cursed her long legs.

"I'm not a mean stupid head," she shouted back, not bothering to hide her amusement. "It's your fault for being gullible!"

The wind rustled the tall grass as they pressed deeper into the forest.

They passed by moss-covered boulders and fallen logs and alternated between trudging through the wildly overgrown grass and the occasional patches of dirt that were much easier to walk on.

Finally, as the sun had climbed to shine directly overhead–the beams that peaked through the leafy trees and the small occasional clearings made it evident–they found a promising-looking den.

"So…" Kieran picked up once again as they found a pond near the den, "looks like we found the water-n-the cave and…" he trailed off. "Sis… what're you doing?"

"All investigative teams have someone at base camp, Kiki. *Obviously*, I'm at the base camp." Carmine said as she sat down on a large rock.

Her brother scoffed, "You just don't wanna get a lil'muddy."

"Which of the two of us *has* a phone in case we need help?" Carmine countered as she crossed her arms and pointedly ignored that her brother was right.

"Do ya even have service out here?" Kieran asked incredulously.

"Quit back talkin' me," she huffed. "Let's just get to lookin' for your big ol' beast."

Translation: No.

Her need to stay sitting on the rock of *base camp* had vanished entirely as she shook with aggravation.

Kieran huffed a soft laugh, "Sure, sis."

The siblings stood at the mouth of the cave, cautiously peaking into the dark entrance. It took several heartbeats for their eyes to adjust to the dim lighting.

"Doesn't look like there's anything in there," Carmine noted aloud as she squinted.

"Check it out, sis," Kieran replied, unable to keep the jab to himself. His voice dripped with sarcasm, "It's the *Code*, right?"

"Are you *still* stuck on that little joke?" she retorted, scoffing as she stepped forward. "I mean, I *get it*. I can do it if *you're* scared."

"I ain't scared!" Kieran huffed as he pushed ahead of her and stepped into the cave.

At first, nothing happened. Kieran took a few more steps in.

Silence.

Three more steps in, and suddenly, Kieran yelled and started staggering backward, scrambling toward his sister.

"What happened!? WHAT'S IN THERE?" Carmine screeched as she stood in the mouth of the cave.

And then Kieran started laughing. "Gotcha," he looked over his shoulder at her, grinning. "You were freakin' out so much!!!"

"You are such a *pest*," Carmine groaned. "I was *not* freaking out."

"You totally were!"

"No, I was *not*. I *wasn't* worried about you at all!"

Kieran chuckled at her as he started venturing deeper into the cavern, unable to keep the amused sing-song tone out of his voice. "Sure, sure, if you say so."

"Ugh. I hope the next thing in the cave eats you."

Kieran continued snickering as he continued deeper into the cave. His sister noticeably stayed at the mouth of the cave and made no move to join him.

Once again, all was silent.

Then, there was a flicker of movement in the shadows. Kieran frowned as he strained his eyes. He wasn't sure if he was seeing things or not.

Then there was movement again, and he sighed, "Quit playin' around, sis."

"I'm not doing anything, Kiki."

"Yeah, right," Kieran scoffed.

"No, seriously, I'm not doin' anything," Carmine replied as Kieran saw more movement *near* him–*it didn't look like Carmine's shadow.*

Kieran turned to look at her, and… true to her word, she was standing exactly as she'd been when he ventured in.

And something cold moved and touched him–followed by a garbled cry.

Kieran screamed and took off running. He leaped into his sister's arms as *whatever was in the cave* seemed to move *with* him, following him out. Carmine shrieked as she staggered backward when she caught her brother.

Kieran snaked his way around her, his arms locked around her neck and his legs around her torso. At the same time, she haphazardly gripped the back of his jacket with one arm. She used her other arm to flail gracelessly to find the cliffside in

an attempt to steady herself from falling backward. It was no use with the addition of her heavy-for-a-small-kid little brother clinging to her like a lifeline.

She was unsuccessful as she lost her balance and landed on her back upon the ground with Kieran on top of her.

And then they heard the noise again while Carmine scrambled to sit back up as her brother was an absolute *deadweight* on her.

What was it? What is it?

And then they heard the noise again—a soft, timid little squeak as a small Phantump appeared in the cave, tilting its little stumpy head at the two before harmlessly floating past them. "Tump!"

Silence.

They continued to cling to one another for a heartbeat longer as the Phantump floated away and disappeared into the shade of the trees—and then, they erupted into the loudest fit of laughter.

"YOU WERE SO SCARED!!!"

"NOT NEARLY AS SCARED AS YOU WERE!!"

"I THOUGHT YOU WERE GONNA PASS OUT!!"

"YOU SCREAMED LOUD ENOUGH TO BREAK GLASS!!!"

Kieran struggled to climb out of her lap, still shaking with laughter while his sister wheeze-laughed, unable to keep herself upright. Their laughter was loud in the otherwise still forest.

Gradually, their laughter subsided as they continued exploring the forest, going deeper and deeper. Rustling in the trees and grass had them jumping occasionally. However, the rustling was *just* an occasional small and harmless Pokémon. Specifically: three Wooper, two Pachirisu, a Hatenna, four Aipom, and seven Litwick. *(Not that anyone was counting, for the record.)*

"You are such a wimpy baby!"

"You jumped higher than I did!!!"

"Ugh. I'm gonna knock you out if you keep back talkin' me."

"No, you ain't. You'd have to carry me if ya did, an'you're too lazy for that."

"Shut up."

"But I'm right."

"Quit laughin' about it, Kiki!"

The afternoon was steamy from the humidity, and the summer temperatures were sweltering. The sun continued to creep across the sky from noon to mid-afternoon.

"Kiki, we've been out here for hours, and we've lapped this forest at *least* twice," Carmine finally broke their silence. "I think it's safe to say there's *not* a beast out here."

"We probably just keep missin' it…" Kieran mumbled as he shook his head. "... 'Sides, I *think* the rumors say it's gotta be *foggy*… or somethin'..."

"You could have *mentioned* that part *last night*," Carmine deadpanned, "you know–when you were *begging* me to come out with you."

Kieran was about to reply when, yet again, there was *another* rustling in the grass. This time, it was different– louder… bigger.

It was approaching *very* quickly.

Within the thicket came a loud, sharp *squawk* that sounded *awful*.

It was high-pitched and annoying.

Carmine covered her ears and took a few steps backward before shrieking as she lost her balance. The uneven terrain caused her to tumble down to the hard ground below, right on her back. "*OOF!*"

"Sis?" Kieran called out as he tried to reach her.

But like a stereotypical scene in a B-list comedy, Kieran tripped as he ran in the direction he saw her fall. Somehow managing to be even less graceful than his sister, he landed on the ledge inches before the edge, face-planting into the grass.

All while the squawking continued.

A shadowed blur descended upon Kieran, who scrambled to get up. He was startled and screaming. Carmine forced herself to stand and scramble back up the ledge to find a scene unlike what she had expected.

Her brother was flailing about with their *predator* attacking him and continuing to make the most *obnoxious* squawking in the history of the world.

Her brother wasn't in danger in the slightest.

The offending predator? A Cramorant.

A silly, overly-friendly Cramorant.

That had perched itself on Kieran's shoulder, trying to fit the boy's entire head in its bill.

"I think the lil' guy likes you. You should catch him," Carmine teased with a laugh as she pulled a Pokéball out of her bag and tossed it to Kieran.

"Oh… you think so?"

"Yeah! He's dorky-lookin' like you are."

"HEY!"

In the end, they found *nothing*.

Nothing but memories.

The wind rustled in the trees, and the shrill cries of the evening bug Pokémon were *loud* in the dense thicket behind them. Overhead, the sky was painted in pink, orange, yellow, and lilac hues as they lay in the tall grass on one of the ledges overlooking the Timeless Woods, panting from laughter and exhaustion from the long, hot day in the muggy forest.

Clothing sticking uncomfortably to their sweaty skin, faces flushed from the heat with just the slightest tinge of pink on the tips of their noses from the sun.

"Hey, Kiki," Carmine said as she reached over and tousled his sweaty hair, huffing a laugh as he scowled. Then her laughter ended abruptly as her face morphed into a matching scowl as she realized she had put her hand in sweat, "*Ugh! You're gross.*"

"Don't touch m'hair then," he complained, sticking his tongue out at her.

"Let's go home, you brat," she scoffed, thumping his forehead.

"Hey!"

"Quit being all dramatic. I didn't flick you *that* hard," she huffed and crossed her arms, but a slight smirk played at the corners of her mouth.

Kieran felt himself grin, "You hurt my pride!"

"You don't have pride," she retorted, fully grinning at him. "You're just a twerp."

"Awww man, my feelin's hurt," Kieran huffed before exaggeratedly opening his arms. "Hug me, sis—"

"Ewwww!! Gross. You're sweaty! ABSOLUTELY. NOT."

She took off running again, but Kieran laughed as he chased her back to their small village of a hometown. "Share the love, sis!"

The laugh in her voice was unmistakable, even as she protested, "No way!"

End

Refraction

Written By: Blitz

Hmmmm…"

"Mhm?"

"Hm!"

The chitter and chatter that wafted through the courtyard of Naranja Academy left Briar with a striking feeling of normalcy, even though this would likely be the last time she'd come here for a long while. Of course, she still needed some of the books in the academy to finish up her report on the expedition, but she could have those mailed. There wasn't a need for this long journey anymore.

Ah, how lovely the journey was compared to the destination… if she could fill her report up by spending weeks in Area Zero, then she'd take that over–

"Waugh!"

Though she'd only faintly registered the hemming and hawing of a certain photographer, the realization that said person was mere inches away from her came too late as Briar stumbled right into a blue-haired woman, sending the pair to the ground. The hard, concrete ground.

The sprawled mess of limbs and bruised thighs they became attracted the laughter of some passing students. Luckily, the blue-haired woman only laughed as she worked to untangle

herself from underneath Briar, moving to sit while the other victim of this incident rubbed dirt out of her eyes.

"I'm so sorry, I wasn't paying attention!" Once she opened her eyes, Perrin went to check her camera, feeling the surface over for bumps and scratches.

"Oh, it's alright." Briar laughed in reassurance before she got back to her feet, offering Perrin a hand that she took only once she was certain her precious camera was all right. At least the students who made a ruckus before cleared the way for the two as they walked off to the side. "Are you a student here?"

"Do I look like one?" Perrin stopped and gestured at her clothes, a gesture that got a snort out of Briar.

"Good point, indeed. I'm only here as a visitor, so I admit I'm not entirely familiar with how Paldean students generally appear."

The sun nearby dipped beneath the horizon moment by moment, caking the area in a cool breeze that brought comfort after the intense heat of the day. The lights flickered on, deepening the shadows.

"Yeah, I get it. But I'm just here to get information on the dragon!"

"…"

Huh.

"The dragon?" Briar asked. Perrin grinned and raised her camera, though she didn't take a photo (even if there was a finger on the trigger, itching for one surprise snapshot).

"I've been preparing this past week for an expedition up Glaseado Mountain. I only really swung by for a job to take pictures of the school, but I heard some students talking about how they spotted a big, scary dragon while hiking up the mountain!"

"I see…" Briar wondered if her face was plastered with barely hidden surprise, a thought which ended up confirmed when Perrin actually snapped a photo. Flash off, luckily.

"You're curious too, right? Wonder what kind of pokemon it is—if it's something no one's ever seen before, I *gotta* take the first picture of it! I mean, between my actual work, but…but this is important too!" Perrin's face flushed as she looked up towards the rising moon. "My photo could end up in a pokedex one day!"

Briar laughed, raising a hand to put on Perrin's shoulder. "Who am I to quash the spirit of discovery? In fact, I'll gladly support you in your expedition!"

Perrin let her camera fall to her side again, before she moved to put it in her bag. "Woah, really?"

"Yes, of course!"

Briar removed her hand, instead clapping them both together. "Chasing after your dreams and discovering new things—it's what makes life special! What do you need? Supplies? Oooh, or a travel buddy? I've already discovered one new pokemon. What's one more?"

Perrin's eyes widened. "Wait, you've discovered a *pokemon*?"

"Hah, now *that's* quite the story. Perhaps, if you'll accept me as a traveling partner, I'll tell you all about it."

"Hmmmm…you make a convincing offer. As long as you can keep up, I'm game!"

The two struck their deal, their path to discovery laid out for them. Yet, as the cold grew stronger over the infamous icy mountains, it all but ensured their journey would not be an easy one.

Perrin never imagined she'd be huddled so close to another woman close to the peak of a mountain, but life has a way of surprising you like that. At first, reliance on their thick winter coats and a hearty supply of heating pads were all they needed to retain heat. As the hours ticked by, though, and the sun dipped, an unexpected factor threw a wrench in their plans: a delicate blanket of snowfall that called for more extreme measures.

Winding their jackets together, though, helped for about twenty minutes before Briar was the one to break the ice: "I think I see a cave up there! I know we wanted to reach the peak tonight, but…may it be wiser to set up camp under a roof and start a fire?"

"Hmmmm, well. No complaints here!" Perrin shivered, nodding in agreement as the pair rushed to the cave. A few Lycanrocs took shelter deeper in the cave, so Briar resolved that they both sprayed some repel near the front to create a safe haven from the territorial behavior of their pack.

"You sure came prepared, didn't you?" While Briar rolled out sleeping beds and sprayed the edges of 'camp', Perrin shuffled through Briar's pack, retrieving the dry branches set aside for an emergency fire. As she laid them out, she let Growlithe out of the ball to light the fire, sending him back to the safety of his ball after the fact.

"There's never a thing such as being too prepared on an icy mountain," Briar replied, punctuating her words with a laugh before she sat close to the fire. "So! Before we sleep, there's something I wanted to ask you."

"Yeah?" Perrin began to check her camera, all to make sure it still functioned under these extreme temperatures, but Briar's words made her pause.

"You must tell me—what's the most exciting pokemon you've caught a picture of?"

Perrin breathed out a puff of white that melded back into the cold. As she soothed the numb pinpricks on her fingertips by

rubbing them against one another, she searched through her memories.

One encounter came to mind. One she hadn't had the chance to share with anyone recently.

"I dunno if you'll believe me," she said as she leaned in, shadows cast across her face from the dimming fire, "but I took a photo in a dream once."

"Is that so?" Briar offered no judgment nor any early comments. Nothing but listening ears.

"Yep!" Perrin looked up to the roof. "Y'see, I took a nap under a tree once. Something about it felt weird, but I didn't think about it too much until I opened my eyes and found myself in this weird world. Almost like it was made to be a dream, y'know?"

She reached a hand out. "And flying around, I saw this big, pink blur. Dream me grabbed her camera and took a picture– then I woke up. Holding my camera in real life. You know what happened when I looked at the camera roll?"

Briar's eyes widened, and she leaned in as Perrin presented her with the photo: the very same one she took within the dream, brought back to the waking world.

"It might've been a Munna," Perrin said, punctuated with a sigh, "or maybe it was something more."

"Incredible," Briar breathed. "I hope you don't mind if I assert that it was most *certainly* something more."

"I don't mind," she replied. "I wanna believe that too."

The fire wavered, and flickered, providing only a scant few seconds more of light before it went out and left their hopes in the darkness.

As soon as the sun rose, the two packed up and stepped out of the cave. However, their misled assumptions ended up casting them into one of their most precious memories. For the light Perrin woke Briar up to chase was not the sun…

But something much more brilliant.

Rainbows bathed their surroundings, a palette of colors smeared across the mountain snow until it enchanted the gaze of everyone who approached, layering a haze of glory and appreciation for nature that none dared resisted. As Perrin and Briar emerged from the cave, a couple Lycanrocs trailed behind, gazes similarly trapped between shock and awe at the creature gliding above them.

For the wing spread touched each end of the planet– the multicolored coat attracted all glory, the mere presence of this pokemon rang within the hearts of all familiar with the recreations of its visage.

"Ho-oh," Briar muttered, before a realization hit her almost as strongly as the dazzling light of the legendary pokemon's feathers. "Could this be the 'dragon' we've been chasing?"

Perrin, camera pulled up as she captured as many pictures as her storage space allowed, turned away for a moment. A sheepish smile crossed her face before she went back to work. "Guess that makes more sense than a wholly undiscovered pokemon. But, y'know…"

Briar laughed. "I know, don't worry."

"I knew you would."

Nothing else needed to be said. For their shared goal, their shared passion for the unknown, they were granted a once in a lifetime sight of something truly extraordinary. And perhaps, by the blessing of the rainbow, there'd be many more to come before their final days.

End

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碧の仮面

Briar's Book

Chapter X: Finding Terapagos.

Written By: VeloxVoid
Spot art by: Aatom87 & Cas Lynn

Date: X/X/XXXX

My heart has never beat so hard, not before, nor since.

In the underdepths of Area Zero, a thick, dense aura surrounds you. It's in the very air: a stale scent, like damp rock, and a pulse. A heartbeat – a life source. The place is alive.

But not with the present. No, here, in the arteries of the Great Crater of Paldea, you are in the past.

It's the only sensation that surrounds me as I walk with the other Trainers. I can see they're just as on edge as I am, looking at their reflections in the walls made from shards of pure Tera Crystal. The Pokémon that watch us from afar are just as described in the Scarlet Book – their presence stirs something deep and primal within my blood.

It is as I grit my teeth, desperately wishing for my theory to be correct, that we see it. My heart stops in my chest – it leaps up to my throat, making me draw a sharp breath of the cold, musty air – and I can't move. I can't swallow, I can't even blink. It's as if I myself have been Terastallized.

We all seem to spot it at once. Lying on the floor, its many angles glinting in the light. Kieran regains his feet first and dashes to pick it up: the stone – the crystal – the… shell? It's cyan, with a marking that looks just like the Terastal symbol: the shape of my earrings, the shape on the page of the Scarlet Book, the shape of my dreams. Seeing it so up close, I can't help myself – I run forward and shout the one thing that's on my mind:

"There's no doubting it! This crystal must be Terapagos!"

I didn't think I'd ever get to say those words. I'd hoped for it, of course – dreamt about it since I was a little girl. But now, I have said it. *We did it.* We found Terapagos. My life's work… it hasn't all been for naught.

Before the tears can rise to my eyes, the shell begins to glow in Kieran's hands. No, perhaps *'glow'* is too tame a word for it… The shell bursts into fractals of light, white and yellow and blue. It blinds me momentarily, making me close my eyes, but I force myself to peer through my eyelashes, my retinas searing in the radiance. I almost can't believe it; the shell begins to float, drifting up from Kieran's fingers until it rises above his head, and begins to change shape.

It swells. It grows. And suddenly, sprouting out from the crystal, I see four long legs, a curled tail adorned by a star-like tip, and most shockingly, a head.

It isn't the head itself that surprises me – of course, I know that Terapagos is a Pokémon, and most Pokémon have some sort of head – but it's the face that makes me gasp. Terapagos has two crystal shapes in the place of ears, three crystals forming a crest atop its head, and one between its eyes like the centrepiece of a diadem. But its face… Quite simply, it is cute. Standing out from its dark purple scales, its little pink nostrils are reminiscent of a baby's. Its mouth is small and curved naturally into a lovable smile. Its eyes are huge, and glimmer with wonderment and curiosity.

I suppose I thought Terapagos would be more… threatening. In the Scarlet Book, it looks like a huge beast, with a shell like armour and adorned with shards. The Pokémon that stands before us, having dropped to the floor, does not look dissimilar to a Tirtouga, or even a Squirtle – it stands around the same height, too.

The cry it lets out from its smiling mouth is quiet, with the exact same crackling sound that all Pokémon make upon Terastallizing. Upon realising this, my heart leaps – this must be where that sound comes from, from Pokémon channelling Terapagos! Does Terapagos's power, or ancestry, run within the blood of all Pokémon? Have I just given way to a new theory? I don't know, I need to research it – in the moment, my mind is just racing too much – but then, I watch Terapagos move.

The Pokémon looks around at us all. Myself and Kieran standing behind it, with Carmine and Florian ahead of us. When Terapagos sees Florian, it raises its head. Its eyes widen – its little smile broadens. With purpose, and without hesitation, it begins to walk towards him.

Everything happens in a flash. Florian startles slightly as Terapagos sets its sights on him. While it seems to walk as quickly as it can, its steps are slow – at that moment, I was writing down its mannerisms in my scruffy notebook – but suddenly, Kieran recoils with a yelp.

"No…" he'd said, his voice echoing off the crystalline walls. His hand flew to his belt, and from it he grasped a Poké Ball. "You're MINE!" he called as he threw the Ball through the air.

The colour of the Ball catches the light. And I realise it is no ordinary Poké Ball. Its paint is not red… it is purple.

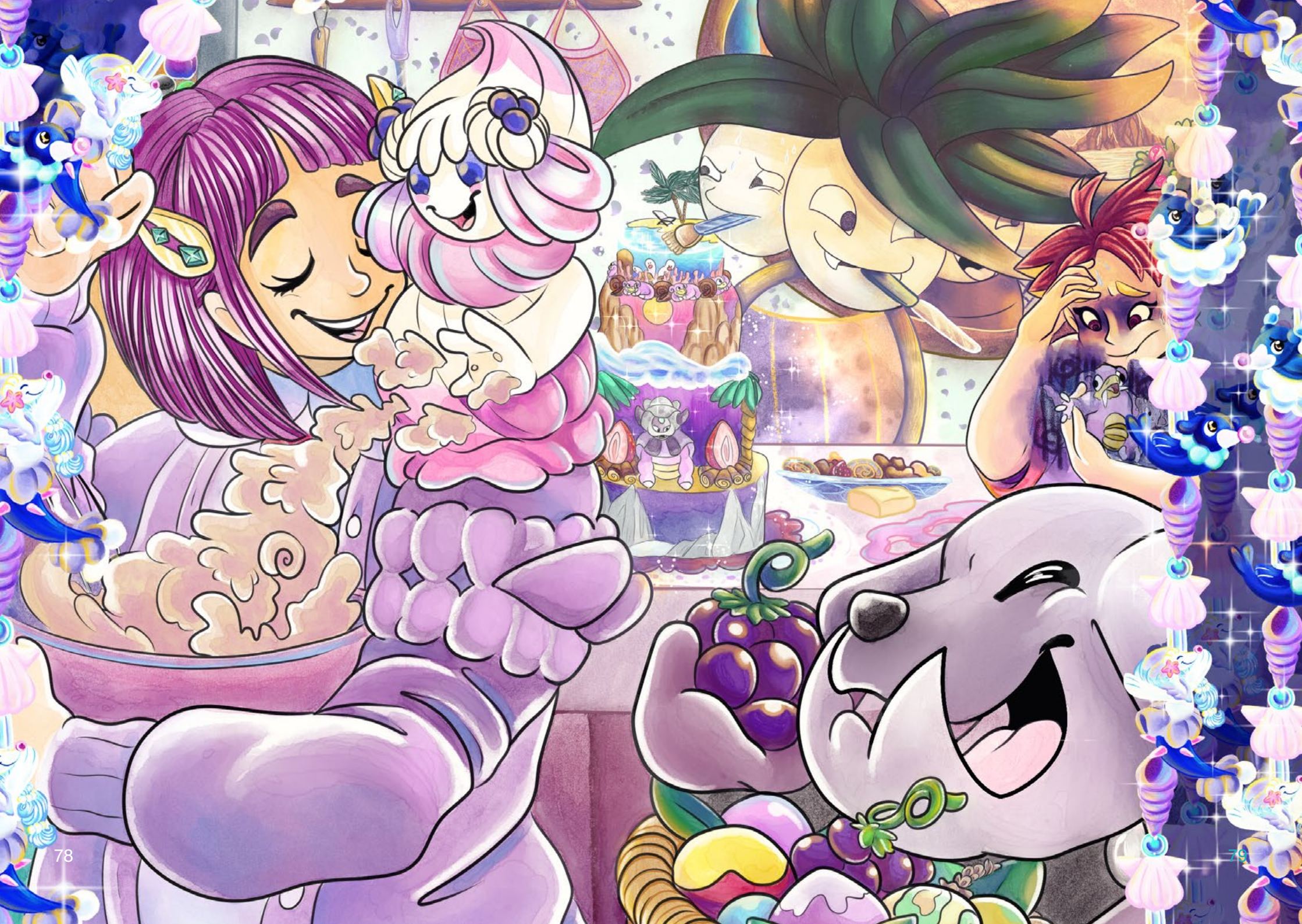
A Master Ball! It reaches Terapagos and opens up, absorbing the Pokémon in purple light. My pulse surges; in that one short moment, everything changes. There will be no escape from that Master Ball. Kieran has captured the mighty Terapagos. The treasure to end all treasures – the Pokémon that Heath, my ancestor, my forebearer, gave his life to research. Now, I can prove him right. I can laugh in the faces of all those who shunned him. I can research Terapagos whenever I want, and now, nothing can stop me.

Happiness, excitement, dizziness – in that moment, watching Kieran pick up the Master Ball containing the Tera Pokémon itself, all emotions and sensations overcome me. Though, while I didn't realise it at the time, I now know that the thing that overcame me the most…

…

… was greed.

End



Yes, Chef!

Written By: PerennialFall
Spot art by: Herakushi

Crispin's first in line at the Blueberry Cafeteria.

His spatula hovers over the pancakes as Amarys marches in at the strike of the hour. By the time she's seated and measuring her precise amount of syrup, Lacey sidles in, composing herself after a barrage of questions from the league club's newest recruits. No one holds their breath for Drayton. On some mornings, it's a miracle if he even rolls out of bed.

"Finals next month," Crispin says, tucking a bit of pancake into his cheek. "You two feeling confident?"

"I am prepared," Amarys reports, cutting soundlessly into her pancake.

"Must you remind me?" Lacey shakes her head. "I have enough to be doing without thinking about it at breakfast, too."

"C'mon, where's that fire? Don't cha wanna graduate?"

"Not really."

He pauses, whipping up a smile before Drayton eases down next to him.

"You don't wanna be stuck at Blueberry forever, right?"

"I don't know." Drayton smirks. "We have it pretty good here. No cooking, no cleaning, no rules."

Lacey interjects, "There *are* rules."

"You'll have to fend for yourselves after graduating, y'know," Crispin warns. "No more academy pizzas and sundaes whenever the urge strikes."

"I know." Drayton pulls a frown. "It sounds terrible."

Crispin clenches his teeth, thinking back to the countless meals they've shared together. To Drayton dipping fries into his ice cream, his eyes cold and dispassionate as it coats his tongue. To Lacey balancing towers of cakes onto her plate. To Amarys stopping an uncanny thirty seconds by the vending machine in the midst of her study marathons.

They were the Elite Four! Where were their standards? Then again, who needed to cook with a wallet full of battle points?

"What's terrible is not even trying!" He springs to his feet, using his frypan to single them out. "None of you are leaving this academy until I know you can put your own meal on the table. I'll throw us a cooking class tonight in the clubroom. What do you say?"

Amarys freezes mid-cut, calculating the disruption to her schedule. Lacey covers her mouth, affronted. For a moment, no one moves. Even the surrounding tables have stopped to listen in.

"Sure," Drayton answers, returning the shock. "It'll be a good ol' rowdy time."

That evening, they're greeted in the clubroom by four countertops with a cooking station. Pots and pans dangle from the racks. Measuring cups and spoons clatter in the cupboards beneath. Dancing Tatsugiris, twirling Alcremies and bounding Fidoughs line the walls. It's impressive Crispin managed to throw this together in a single day, though no one mentions it out loud.

Lacey touches her lips as she pokes around the kitchen, wishing he'd kept her pink paneled wallpaper and twinkling fairy lights.

"This lesson, we'll be making something easy. Something tasty and filling that even a beginner can throw together." Crispin slaps the countertop. "A curry."

"Popular in the Galar region," Amarys notes.

He grins in a way that makes Drayton wish he had some other, more exciting hobby and says, "That's right."

A basket of ingredients awaits beside their cutting boards. It's packed to the brim with carrots, onions and leeks, a tin of curry powder and a carton of fresh cream. Beneath the crisp layer of vegetables, Amarys is surprised to unearth a pack of pasta. Lacey discovers a foiled block of Moomoo cheese. Drayton takes a bite out of his precooked burger.

"I threw in some extras," he says, hoping they'll trade. "If you're feeling brave, you can put your own twist on the flavor. Well then, time to get cooking!"

He walks them through the basics: how to wash the ingredients, how to build flavor, how to determine which end of the knife is used for cutting. Once he's confident no one wants to lose their fingers, he gives a demonstration, fingertips curling away from his blade, which vibrates like the wing of a Skarmory. This draws a few gasps, followed by a single clap that waits until his countertop boasts perfectly divided heaps of color.

It's their turn next.

Crispin bites his tongue, hands twitching as he swallows the urge to take over. Not so fast. Not so *shaky*. He guides their hands and wrists into a more ergonomic position, glowing at Lacey's thanks. Relief flickers in Amarys's eyes when he announces they aren't fighting the clock. By the time he turns his gaze to Drayton, it's done, neatly and inarguably.

Drayton shrugs. "Who wants to be stuck doing the boring stuff?"

"That's the spirit!" Crispin echoes with a dent in his brow.

When the heat from their pans reaches a sizzle, he hops from station to station.

Amarys stands with her head lowered, and Crispin snatches her attention with a spin of his frypan. She gives the slightest hint of being startled. There's a book on the countertop, a new one he guesses from the white of the pages. A quick skim tells him that she's reading about times and temperatures and how one can never uncook a charred slab of Veluza.

"Reading up, huh?"

"I want to do well in your class."

"That's fire." He leans forward. "But you've gotta remember, cooking's an art. You've gotta see it, taste it, and smell it! You can't do that through a book."

"I see." She adjusts her glasses. "I will do my utmost to make this a practical lesson."

He tips in the onions, stepping away once he's confident she won't let them stick to the pan.

Fletchling quick, Crispin then pivots over to Lacey's station, who's preoccupied with something he doesn't remember packing into her basket: the bag of sugar from their tea and coffee machine. She hms, mouth tilting into a frown as she scoops inside with a measuring cup.

"Don't like my ingredients?"

"Eek!" Lacey jumps, almost spilling the sugar over the floor. She glares at him, indignant. "Sneaking up like that? It's just not right, Crispin!"

"I could say the same thing about what you're gonna do to those leeks."

"I…" She glances around as she finds the words. "I much prefer sweet things."

"Nothing wrong with that. But where's the spice in your life if you don't try new flavors, too?" The spark in his eyes convinces her to stay her hand. "Don't be so rigid. Besides, Moomoo cheese is sweet enough."

With mercy, she giggles and lowers the sugar.

A similar emergency pulls Crispin over to Drayton, who's handling something he *does* recognise from the basket. Salt. He breaks the first rule of his kitchen by running.

"Whoa, whoa! Hold up!"

There's a great look of concentration on Drayton's face as he holds the canister upside down, watching it pour like snow over his perfectly sautéd vegetables.

"Just adding some flavor to the dish, boss."

"Chef," Crispin corrects, flaring red, not just from the heat of the cooktop, "and you don't need anywhere near that much!"

"Yes, Chef," Drayton answers, delight in his eyes when Crispin confiscates it and marches away.

Ten minutes pass, in which Crispin scrapes everything from his cutting board into his beloved frypan, tossing the ingredients over the heat like a circus trick. Once it's time for the main ingredient, he adds a cup of sliced chorizo and sets it all into a saucepan. The lid closes over a brew of spices and simmering cream, elevated by a squeeze of lime.

He stops by Amarys's station, filling his lungs as the scent of curry permeates the room.

"I have given some consideration to what you said about cooking being an art."

Her hand emerges from her pack clutching a shiny red apple. Round, unwaxed, bursting with the promise of something juicy and tart. He swears he's seen it before, until he remembers Carmine presenting Amarys with a box of them after class.

"These are my favorite," she says, "from Kitakami."

"Nice." It's not his first choice of protein, but he smiles eagerly. "Your curry's got your signature on it already."

"And is that important? A signature?"

"I think so."

With a nod, she returns her full attention to the chopping board.

Lacey's station is not at all what he expects. He zips over, eyes wide, lowering the heat until the flames subside and clasps the lid down on the saucepan. She smiles like nothing is wrong, her hair sticking up in slight pink wisps. He decides against admonishing her. If for no other reason, because he's used to it being the other way around.

"I wanted to prove that I'm not afraid of trying new things!"

He flashes a too-early thumbs up. "That's great!"

"So I asked Amarys what she likes." She fidgets before pressing on. "Dark chocolate, coffee, kale salad. She likes bitter foods, so I went and added a whole lemon to the curry. Oh and some dandelion greens I picked yesterday by the beach."

"Sounds interesting." Crispin sweats behind the grin. It's too late to rescue the lemon. "I'll try anything at least once."

Lacey goes back to stirring with pursed lips.

He doesn't like Drayton being so quiet. From the corner of his eye, he sees him glance over his shoulder then resume whatever he's doing to dampen the sound of the saucepan. He gasps. With a quick hand, he intercepts him plonking scoops of horseradish into the dish with a lazy smile.

"What are you doing?"

"Cooking." Drayton's smile sharpens. "Thought if I made it more your style, you'd get off my back."

"You're scorching the flavor! And is that—" Crispin stares at the countertop. "Are you eating the burger I put in your basket?"

"Sorry, Chef. Got hungry. You did good on the cheese to meat ratio."

Crispin laughs before losing his temper. Anyone who knows him recognises the signs. Cheeks flushed, head thrown back, a fist balled against his stomach that flattens then cuts through the air like a sword. Drayton straightens his back and raises the horseradish over his head, dangling it just out of reach.

"Give it here!"

"Now, now. Say please."

"I've never seen Crispin take anything so seriously," Lacey murmurs out of earshot.

Amarys nods while pouring a packet of pasta into her curry.

Twenty minutes pass, in which Crispin demonstrates the magic of a rice cooker and chops some coriander, hoping it'll distract Drayton with something to sprinkle. He feels their eyes on him, breaths held as he plates up all four curries, taking in their colors, their textures, their hints of apple, chorizo and cheese. He blushes with pride.

"Alright everyone, I'll be wearing my judging hat. Don't let me down!"

He dips a spoon into Amarys's first, digging deep, his eyes sparking with recognition when the taste hits his mouth. It's unconventional, but nice. The pasta and apple are an odd combination, but the spices remind him of a pie pulled fresh from the oven and left on his parents' windowsill. He meets her eyes, and she glances away, feeling warm.

"Not bad. I'd like to see you make this again." His tone rises playfully. "Maybe next time, Carmine can try some too."

"That would be agreeable." Amarys gathers her thoughts in the pause. "What grade would you give this?"

"A solid three outta five stars."

"I see." She nods, and he thinks he glimpses a smile. "There is much to learn about cooking."

With a deep breath, Lacey pushes her plate forward and hands Crispin a spoon. He does his best to look natural and with his own deep breath, takes a bite, hoping his gut feeling will prove him wrong. It doesn't. The flavor floods through him like a chill, so bitter his eyes water. He fights the urge to shove the plate away.

"How is it?" she asks brightly.

He stares at her.

"Well?"

"It's kinda weird," he admits, unable to swallow.

Huffing, she snatches a spoon and tastes it, eyes wider than he's ever seen. She forces it down with a grunt, and he can't help but respect her for it.

"Oh. You're right. Maybe I should stick with the flavors I like from now on."

Crispin recovers from the waste bin, nursing his head. "That'd be fire."

"Does this constitute a fail?"

His stomach twists, sensing a trap. "I won't fail you for giving your best and plating something. Even if it's the kinda thing only a Pokémon could enjoy. Good job, Lacey. You'll be cooking for people in no time!"

Lacey covers her mouth, scandalized, as he breezes down the counter.

He isn't sure what to expect from Drayton's curry. If he's being honest, there doesn't appear to be anything wrong with it on the surface. The thickness gives him hope along with its robust color, liquid gold tumbling over the rice. He's even garnished the dish with a pop of coriander as opposed to a mountain of it.

"Don't go looking at my food like it'll poison you. You'll hurt my feelings."

"Let's see what you've got."

He takes it in, expecting to flinch from the salt or horseradish, and blinks. It's good. *Suspiciously* good. With a subtle note of lime folded into the flavor. He takes a second bite and blinks again.

"What'd you do?"

"Started over when you weren't looking," Drayton says with a wink.

"Really?" Crispin presses, releasing a scoop back into the saucepan.

"Yes, Chef."

"How'd you get this consistency?"

"Well that's easy. You've just gotta turn it nice and slow. And pour in the love like your spot in the Elite Four depends on it." Drayton manages not to laugh. "Okay, look, I borrowed some of yours. You'd be able to tell if you'd tasted it as you went. Isn't that one of the first rules of cooking?"

Crispin staggers like he's taken a dragon claw. That Drayton, of all people, could call attention to this forgotten detail feels miraculous. He grins, unable to lose his temper, and Amarys and Lacey exchange a look.

"Made you smile." Drayton's gaze is cold but searching, his tone lax. "Does that get me a pass?"

Not wanting a repeat of the class, Crispin shoots him a thumbs up.

"You'd better bring the heat next time. No horseradish either, got it?"

Drayton doesn't make any promises.

They share in Crispin's five star curry, its flavor zesty and sharp, before the dreaded clean up. It passes quickly for a group unused to the labor. Amarys rounds up each of the utensils, plates and pans, dropping them to Lacey who scrubs them clean, who hands them to Crispin to dry. Drayton naps on a nearby bench, unbothered by their chatter or choice of music.

Lacey decides she can stand keeping the clubroom the way it is for a while longer. At least, until she makes something

worth taking a photo of. Amarys encourages Lacey's dream, her posture tight with concentration. Crispin beams and rattles off loudly about baking. Cakes aren't his favorite thing, but for her, he'll make an exception.

They reconvene at Drayton's bench, minds buzzing, leaping to tomorrow's concerns. A deluge of battles awaits them. Not to mention their final papers before exams hit.

Drayton tunes it all out with a yawn.

"All this cooking's got me hungry for dessert," he says, elbows forming a box over his head. "What do we say? Are we down for some academy sundaes?"

"A refreshing sundae sounds agreeable."

"One can't hurt."

"That's three votes. What say you, Chef?"

Crispin stamps a red mark into his forehead with his palm.

End

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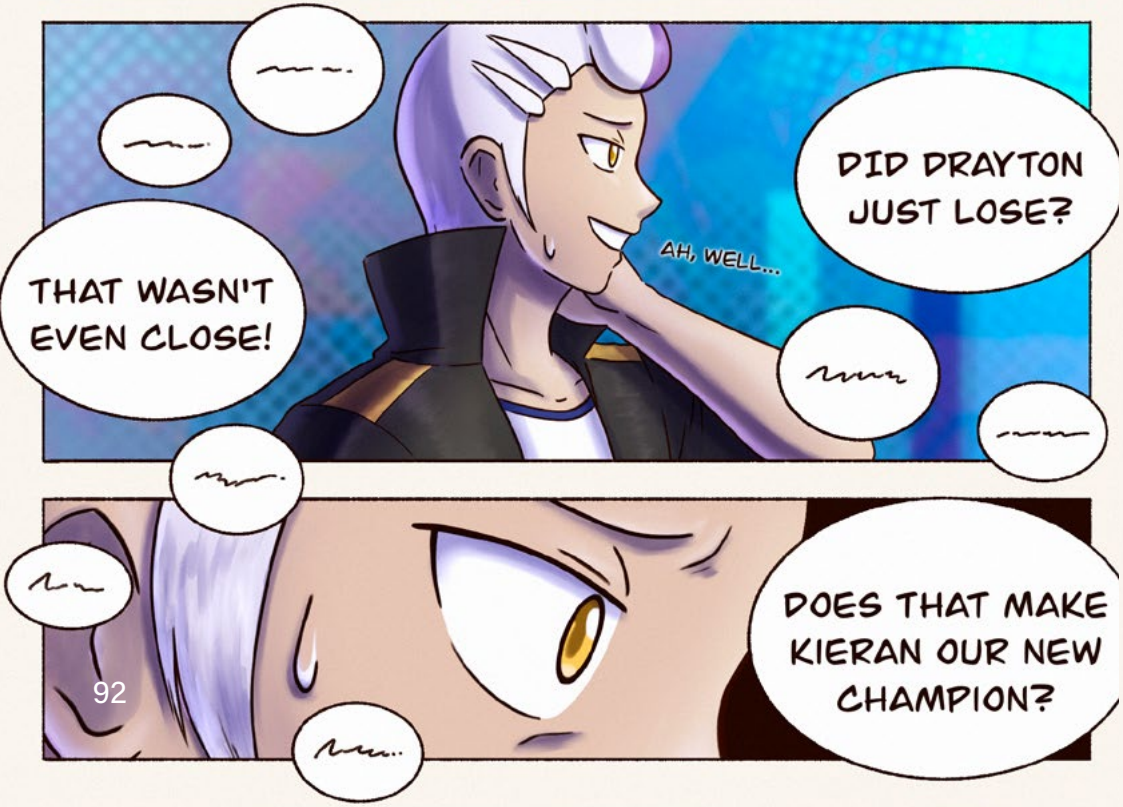
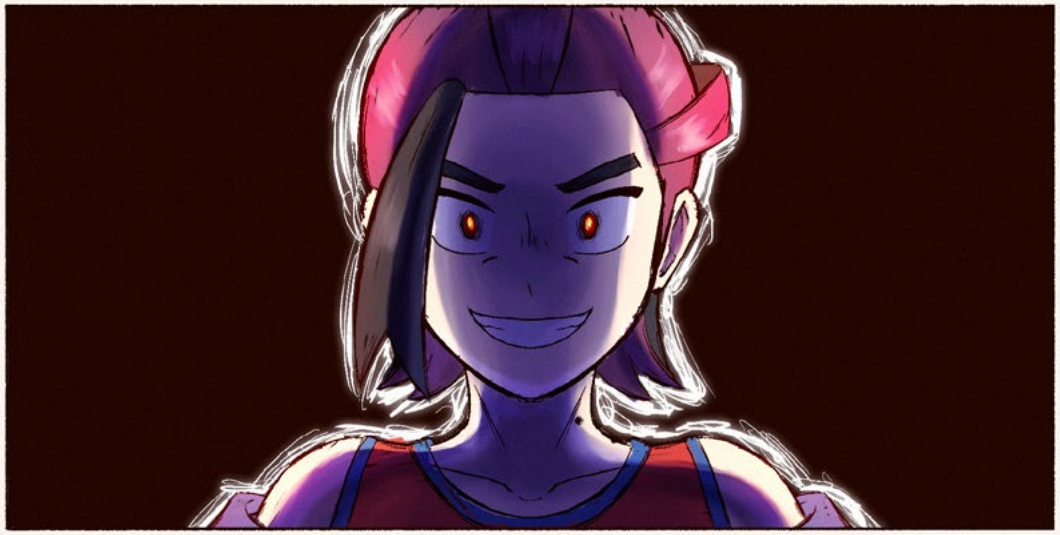

THAT WASN'T EVEN CLOSE!
AH, WELL...
DID DRAYTON JUST LOSE?
DOES THAT MAKE KIERAN OUR NEW CHAMPION?

KIERAN...



WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?

A Slacker's Guide on Taming Battle-hungry Children

Written By: Ellory
Spot art by: Minhriart & Cheru

That new champion was a piece of work, that's for sure.

Kieran, the shy kid who always hid behind his aggressive sister, *demolished* Drayton's team in one fell swoop with a passionate fire that he had never seen before. Drayton had made the perfect team to combat any surprises somebody could dare to throw at him, and yet, Kieran, in spite of his assumed lack of experience, outsmarted *him*.

It was an awesome battle with adrenaline rushing through his veins, even when it was clear he was going to lose. When his Archaludon fainted, Drayton was no longer champion.

At first, he loved it. He had no more responsibilities. Oh, and those naps were heaven. As a bonus, Lacey didn't bother him for anything because of his demotion. This was a great way to get to graduation, just doing what he wanted without any responsibilities on his shoulders. He always had been a relaxed guy, coasting through life, going along for the ride. There was never a reason for him to take action like his gramps always insisted he *had* to.

That was until Kieran's new rule list for the club came out.

As he reviewed every ridiculous rule just to *stay* in the club, it didn't take long for him to piece together that though the kid was a natural battler, he wasn't a born leader. Kieran just

was obsessed with power and control. He was going to stress everyone out with these guidelines. This was supposed to be a relaxed club focused around the joys of battling, not…*whatever* this was.

Kieran crossed another line when he started teasing Drayton about his loss. He couldn't show the kid he was bothered by his demeaning words, but rage started to fester, boiling in his ribcage. It was ready to burst like an untamed Dragonite at any moment. It became enough to where his spite motivated him.

He couldn't sit by and let everyone be stuck with this. *He* couldn't live through this. There were too many requirements just to be a member of the club and it cut into his own precious relaxation time. He'd do something about it, but he couldn't challenge Kieran again. Kieran had crushed him. His articulate strategy crumbled after that Porygon came out. He needed someone with stronger pokemon.

No, someone *new*.

Someone who's battle strategy Kieran couldn't have studied beforehand. A wildcard.

His lucky day came when a kid around Kieran's age had been battling against Carmine in the Central Plaza. A kid he had never seen before. He stopped to observe the battle and was blown away by the results. Carmine's never been a pushover in battle, so when this kid wiped her team out without any struggle even in ways he couldn't predict, Drayton had found his answer.

He made himself known. Carmine, of course, was less than pleased.

"This is Drayton." Carmine introduced with a frown. "He's the worst."

He didn't bother to correct her because she was right. For her sour attitude and rude behavior, she did have a funny side to her. After Carmine was nice enough to introduce him, he waved with a soft smile on his face.

"He is the strongest trainer at the academy…" Carmine trailed off for a second before she continued in her same flat voice, but her eyes shined with amusement. "At least, he was."

"Beautiful intro. Thanks." Drayton smiled.

"This is my friend, Florian. He's an exchange student here and a friend of mine." Carmine rambled on, but Drayton tuned her out.

A friend of Carmine's must have been a friend of Kieran's…

Drayton took over the conversation, crossing his arms. "You wouldn't know Kieran, would you? You're friends with him, right?"

"Yeah, we're friends." Florian nodded with an innocent smile.

"Ohoho, that's great." Drayton's smile only brightened as he leaned in. "You're gonna want to join a club, right? It'll make your Academy experience better. Follow me."

He didn't even need to look back to know that Florian had followed behind without any question because he could still hear Carmine whining about how awful he was.

After their silly little "date" at the cafeteria, Florian was almost too eager to join the league and take out Kieran. It took almost no effort on Drayton's end.

Just the way he liked it.

As everyone tried to challenge the powerhouse that was Florian and eventually fell to his might, Drayton showed his support each time to congratulate him. He may *or* may not have given Florian pointers about the others in the Elite Four and what to expect from them. It really wasn't bad to be back in the Polar Biome. He really wouldn't have minded staying put and let the chips fall where they may *if* Kieran hadn't just freaking ruined everything with his stupid rules!

When it was almost his turn to fight Florian, that's when he started to regret how he handled this. Florian was genuinely a good, sweet kid who just wanted to battle and make sure his buddy was alright. Drayton, on the other hand, was doing this for far more selfish reasons.

In spite of his regret, Drayton marched on with his plans.

Their own battle was exhilarating. The kid kept him on his toes, not even phased with Archeduleon's stamina. Of course, Florian sweeped his team. Drayton didn't even have to throw, which felt *great*. He wouldn't have risked throwing anyway. If Florian couldn't beat him, he would have had *no* chance against Kieran.

Yet, the battle fueled his own nostalgia. He almost felt *alive* again during that battle. Like when he was just barely starting his own adventure, exploring the world and building his own team.

Those days…man, he missed them. Nowadays, he was exhausted, just *waiting* for something new and exciting to happen. Maybe this would spark his own motivation-

No, after this, he needed a *looong* nap.

After the battle, Drayton grabbed Florian something small to eat. Florian gobbled it down without hesitation as if he hadn't eaten for days. Drayton took his time with his own. It may have been regret, but the snack didn't have as much flavor as he had expected.

In their silence, the young kid spoke up with his head lowered. "Do you think Kieran even likes me anymore?"

Drayton wasn't sure how to answer that, but he tried. "I'm sure he does, wanting to get your attention like this."

"But he's been so cold to me." Florian frowned, wrapping his knees close to him before resting his head on them. "I think he just wants to beat me. To win."

"Nah, It's way more than just you." Drayton admits. "He never said it, but he always wanted to be more than he was. He just took it way too far. Maybe you beating him can put some sense back to him."

"You really think so?"

"Yeah. When I battled with you, I felt like I was traveling around Unova again with my first pokemon. I betcha that same passion will help Kieran."

"Why me? Aren't others able to beat him?"

"I'm sure someone would eventually dethrone him, but…" Drayton glanced at Florian with a smile. "You're his friend, right?"

"Yeah! Just like you and me!"

Drayton's heart dropped with guilt. Though he had *said* it, he hadn't considered Florian to actually be a friend. After all, the awkward *'are we friends yet'* conversation hadn't been brought up. Though he *liked* the idea of being Florian's friend, it's likely

he would backtrack on the idea once he realized how much Drayton's not worth the trouble. That's just how things always went with Drayton.

Even so, he wouldn't let Florian down after all he'd done to help the club out.

After all, what else are friends for?

"Y'know what? You're right. Like you and me, Bud." He ruffled the future champion's hair. "Go get to the front desk and I'll meet ya there. We'll get you signed up for the Champion fight in a jiffy."

The young kid's expression brightened before running off in the completely wrong direction. It wasn't even a worry for Drayton. He waved the kid off. Perhaps he should have confessed what he did right then and there….provided the kid hadn't figured it out yet. It's not as if he's been subtle about the whole thing.

He decided to follow Florian to talk, but before he could move, he was alerted of a message from his Rotom phone with the automessage of one of the stupid rules. Kieran's three battle rule on Fridays. He groaned before putting his Rotom back.

Two more to go for today or he's gonna be kicked out of the club…

He had to focus on Kieran getting dethroned first. Then, he'd fess up.

That was a beautiful battle with intensity unlike any he'd ever seen, and Drayton cannot believe how ridiculously easy this all was for him. No, not for him.

For his best bud, Florian.

"Nice battle, you two." Drayton strolled over before leaning down at Kieran on the ground. "Too bad about the outcome, huh, *ex-champion*?"

He *probably* shouldn't have done that, but it was too sweet of an opportunity to pass up. It had been a little payback for all the trouble Kieran had put *everyone* in.

Even during his little boast, he had to admit that there's something horribly wrong with Kieran. He was taking this loss a lot harder than he had expected. He had thought he was telling the truth to Florian in the Polar Biome, hoping the battle would spark something in Kieran to straighten him out. No, instead, Kieran threw a fit on his hands and knees, curled into himself and tugged on his hair, mumbling nonsense Drayton couldn't hear.

Maybe he needed a minute…

After doing the silly formalities including the Master Ball gift, it was time for Plan B. Someone *finally* laying out the truth to Kieran. Since no one else had bothered, it was about time he handled it before it spiraled out of *everyone's* control.

So in a way, he owed it to Florian to make sure the situation didn't become worse.

He glanced over his shoulder, eyes narrowing at Kieran. "Hey. Kieran."

Kieran didn't even utter a word.

Drayton turned on his heel and continued. "I know this may not be much from someone that couldn't beat you, but I wish you'd go back to having fun with all of this. I get that burning desire of winning. I mean, who doesn't like winning?"

It's almost as if the ex-champion wasn't even on the battlefield, rather, he was a prisoner of his own mind…

"Just…don't let that desire burn you to a crisp. It's hard to watch." It's hard to live through when Kieran is setting everyone else on fire with him. "C'mon, let's all go-"

Kieran finally said something under his breath.

"Come again?" Drayton asked.

"I won't lose next time." Kieran struggled to get back on his feet before shouting. "I…I won't lose! I'll win next time!"

Florian, thankfully, was able to say something to Kieran to make him relax. "It's okay, when we battle again, I hope you do try to win!"

"Aww," Kieran's head dropped in defeat. "Florian…"

Cute…

Even he couldn't do it, but a few words from Florian dropped Kieran's spiky guard. Maybe Drayton didn't need to get involved after all, but he's glad he had. Florian was exactly what the Academy needed.

After Ms. Briar had tried to drag him to Paldea out of all places, and he said no, Drayton was finally able to rest. Scheming took so much work that he wasn't used to. He rested his head on the table as Lacey took the seat across from him.

She frowned. "You're terrible."

"You already told me."

She had already briefed him on the trouble he's caused - rattling up the ranks, distressing Kieran, manipulating Florian…

That last one had been eating him up on the inside since Florian left for Paldea. He lowered his head, averting her gaze. He knew what she was going to say. She didn't need to lecture him. A small smile formed on her face before she nodded.

"I see we're on the same page." Lacey grabs her bag. "Coming to class?"

"You know my answer."

She left without him. Before he was about to rest again, his Rotom went off. He blinked, stunned at who was calling. Someone that never bothered to call him.

He answered immediately. "Hey, Gramps."

"Hey, kiddo. It's been a bit. Wanted to check up on you."

"Well, about that…"

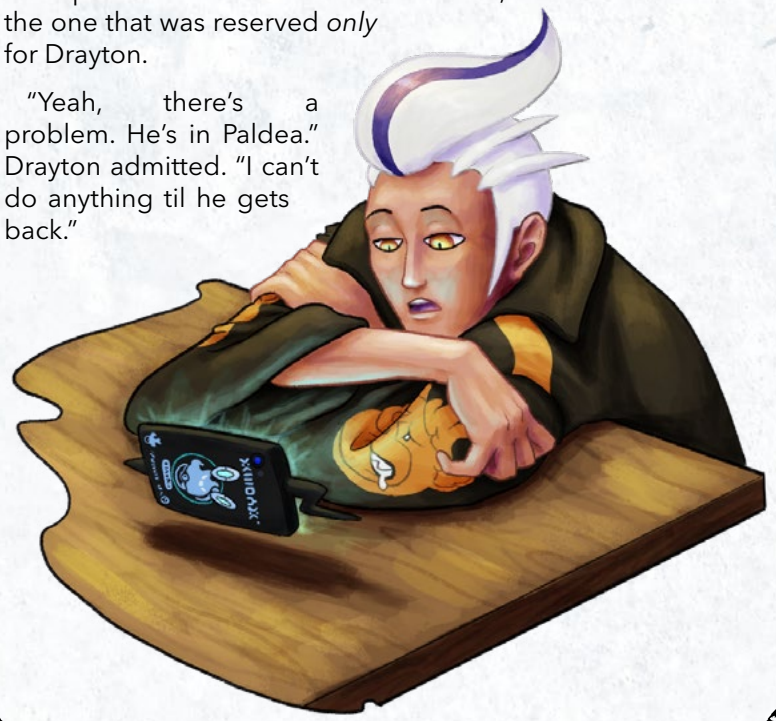
"Talk to me."

Gramps had always been pretty good with people, so Drayton decided to lay it all on his grandpa, who didn't interrupt him once. His expression was a whole different story. His eyes narrowed the more Drayton explained.

When he was done, his grandpa spoke.

"You owe Florian an apology for dragging him into this," Gramps lectured him with that stern tone, the one that was reserved *only* for Drayton.

"Yeah, there's a problem. He's in Paldea." Drayton admitted. "I can't do anything til he gets back."



"Then immediately afterwards. You cannot do that to people, Drayton. You're old enough to know that."

Gramps did have a point.

He lowered his head. "…I couldn't think of what else to do."

"Then come to me next time if you're lost. I know we aren't close, but I care about you. Don't get yourself or others in trouble if you can help it." Gramps assured him. "Honesty will help your young friend know you really care about him. The truth goes a long way, kiddo."

"I'll keep that in mind." Drayton yawned. "Sorry, I've been up a lot more than usual."

"You can do all of that but not go to class?" Gramps shook his head. "I don't get you, kiddo."

Gramp's attention was snatched away as soon as his office phone rang. Drayton sighed through his nose, knowing his short lived conversation with his grandpa was over.

"You gotta go." Drayton offered a weak smile before waving. "See ya."

"Sorry about that. I have to take this call. Talk to you soon."

Suddenly, the silence was too loud and his emotions started fogging his head. Drayton stood up, deciding to step away instead of napping. He wouldn't been able to doze off with all those lingering thoughts of guilt on his mind anyway.

The trip from Paldea ended, and everyone came back *changed*.

Though no one had told him what happened, Drayton pieced together it was a good experience for growth, but a very tumultuous experience. Carmine and Kieran were all but back to normal. Kieran seemed a bit happier than he had been. Even

though he teased Kieran about being ex-champion, he was happy to see Kieran was doing a lot better.

Well, Florian was back and Drayton, in spite of all of his flaws, was a man of his word. He waited for Florian to come to him. Florian waved before standing next to Drayton, who was in his usual spot, resting on the table.

Drayton looked up. "What's up, bud?"

"Just wanted to check up on you. I hadn't heard from ya."

"With how much happened in the League Club, I really needed a long nap." Drayton admitted before he smiled. "Glad you came back safe."

"Thanks!" Florian beams. "You wanna battle?"

"Actually, I needa speak to you about somethin'. Sit down next to me." Drayton swallowed his nerves before patting the chair next to him. He rarely needed to swallow his nerves but Florian was a good friend of his and if he blew it, they were *not* going to be friends after this.

"What's up?"

"First off, congrats, Champ." Drayton smiled. "Really, thank you for conquering the league. All the tension melted away once you became champion."

That was true. The club's just as relaxed as it was before. Just the way he and as it turned out, *everyone* liked it.

"What about you and Kieran?"

"Oh…If I had my Drayster druthers, Kieran and I would be having fun battling again. I thought we'd have things patched up by now, but things aren't that simple."

"Hey! Give it time. If you and Kieran are friends, I'm sure he'll want to share the joys of battling with you again!"

Drayton paused, realizing that he believed Florian without a doubt. After all, Florian was just a bright, friendly kid who wanted the best for everyone.

"You know what to say, huh?" Drayton smiles. "Good quality in a champion."

Maybe he's sucking up a tad too much, but if Florian kept the rules as they are, he'd mean every word he's said.

"Thanks! I'll do my best."

"Yeah, anyway, we aren't talkin' about Kieran and me. I needa talk about us."

"Us?" Florian tilted his head, puzzled.

"Yeah, it's how I handled this mess. I ended up kinda using you to try to get what I wanted, huh? Sorry about that. I dropped the slacker life for once, and I got carried away. Anyway, hope you'll accept my apology, bud. No attitude, just gratitude from me for now on."

Florian laughed. Drayton looked around, trying to find out what was so funny.

"You were *not* subtle about that. I knew." Florian explained. "Truth is, I already made up my mind to help Kieran. It was just nice to have someone walk me through the ropes of the battles and help me out."

"Oh."

So he wasn't as slick as he once thought, but nothing but an amused smile formed on his face. It's the least he deserved for trying to do that to Florian.

Though he still had one question he had to ask. "We're still cool then, bud?"

Florian nodded. "As cool as the Polar Biome."

End

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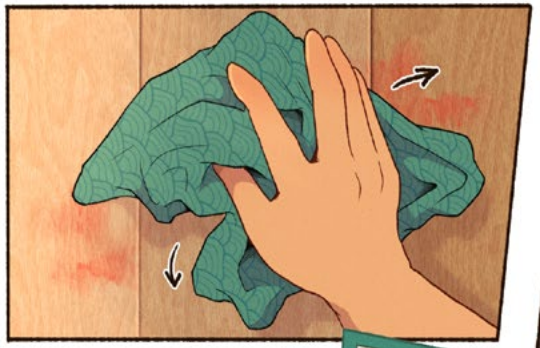

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KLK!

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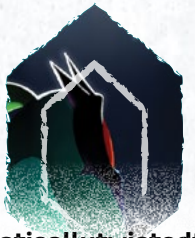

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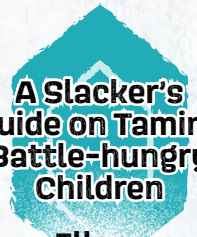
Page Artist
CoolCoolSkies
coolcoolskies
PG. 45



Ellory
Writer
Muffin_Writes
thelocalmuffin
PG. 95 - 106

EV
Writer
EVTrainingUniversity
evtraininguniversity
PG. 38 - 44

Feiyu
Page Artist
_feiyu
feiyufly
PG. 68

herakushi
Page / Spot Artist
herakushi
herasushi
PG. 88, 91

ItsLanners
Page Artist
ItsLanners
ItsLanners
PG. 69

Minhriart
Page / Spot Artist
minhriart
minhriart
PG. 17, 98

Moni
Spot / Merch Artist
monicracar
monicracar
PG. 21, 25, 110

Nym
Page Artist
cherubinym
PG. 37

PerennialFall
Writer
vinthetiefling
PG. 80 - 90

SaimatsuShipper
Writer
Stinkfly3
real-life-pine-tree
PG. 18 - 27

Sinksanksockie
Merch Artist
sinksanksockie
Sockie
PG. 112

slepyborb
Merch Artist
slepyborb
slepyborb
PG. 111

Taruchinator
Writer
taruchinator
taruchinator
PG. 6 - 16

Vanilla
Page Artist
valhamhart
valhamhart
PG. 60 - 61

VeloxVoid
Writer
VeloxVoid
VeloxVoid
PG. 70 - 74

Vivi (Octofae)
Writer
octofae
octofae
PG. 46 - 59

Yami11arts
Cover Artist
yami11arts
yami11arts
COVER, PG. 76 - 77

Yams
Page Artist
princeyams
princeyam
PG. 92 - 93

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Art/Graphics Mod
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Erin
Writing Mod
LeavesBitter

Feiyu
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